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THE CORNHILL

Osbert Sitwell

Betty Miller

Michael Jaffé

J. M. Cohen

Maurice Webb

Steven Runciman

*
With Illustrations

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1949
JOHN MURRAY

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THE CORNHILL



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MAGAZINE

EDITED BY PETER QUENNELL

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JOHN MURRAY, 50 ALBEMARLE STREET, LONDON, W.I.

EDITORIAL NOTE

That agreeable phrase, ' putting the paper to bed,' gives the staff of a magazine, which through no fault of its own comes out only four times yearly, a sense of being involved in the prodigious whirl of Fleet Street. As soon as the Spring issue of the CORNHILL has been safely laid to rest (where one imagines it in canopied repose, looking as peaceful and as innocently remote from life as Carpaccio's St. Ursula so much admired by John Ruskin) the Editor hopes to embark for Sicily ; but on the eve of his departure he would like to repeat the gist of several previous messages. The CORNHILL is a ' literary ' paper, in so far as, whatever it prints, it endeavours to maintain a certain literary standard ; but we are not content to deal exclusively with literary or semi-literary subjects, and shall always welcome essays of a topical or controversial nature. We have still an unbounded appetite for works of imaginative fiction ; but, with some pleasant exceptions, such as a story of Michael Jaffé published in the present number, the type-scripts we receive are, on the whole, somewhat disappointing. We believe that our tastes are catholic. It must be admitted, nevertheless, that stories about talking animals, yarns of the North-West frontier, visions of Heaven or Hell, and massive lumps of life-in-the-raw (which begin usually with ' the worst hangover in years ' and the hero gloomily considering a loose-lipped, blue-chinned barman) are apt to arouse a touch of editorial prejudice.

[*The Editor asks that all contributions should be addressed to him at 50 Albemarle Street, London, W.1, and accompanied by a stamped envelope.*

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The Child of Casa Guidi

BY BETTY MILLER

IT was on an evening of early summer that Mr. Nathaniel Hawthorne and his wife paid their first visit to the Casa Guidi. In the big dimly-lit drawing-room the windows were open, and they could hear through the gathering dusk the chanting of priests in a church close by. Tilted from the wall, a gilt-framed mirror presented an oblique view of heavy tapestries, of hanging lamps and of massive ebony furniture. In the armchair beneath, Mrs. Browning was scarcely visible, dark eyes glowing out of a diminished face, a down-drooping hand too frail, it seemed, to support the weight of its own rings. In her sweet and tenuous voice she questioned her American visitors as to their impression of Florence ; while Mr. Browning hustled about the room, offering, with the teacups, a plate of knead cakes, baked, as he said, by their maid Wilson, a Yorkshirewoman who had once seen service with the Barrett family in Wimpole Street. On a sofa in the corner, meanwhile, sat a small boy of eight or nine years of age. He wore a red velvet smock and a white lace collar ; his golden hair was parted in the centre, like that of Mrs. Browning, and, like her, he wore it curled into long ringlets on either side of his face. He listened with interest to the conversation, answering, when spoken to, in a mixture of English and Italian : when Ferdinando, the manservant, brought in a tray with plates and freshly-plucked strawberries, he jumped up, and walking from chair to chair, gravely offered the dish to each guest in turn.

Upon his return home, Mr. Hawthorne, who was as reticent in company as he was discursive in his notebooks, recorded his impressions of the evening. These centred for the most part around the figure of Penini, the only child of Robert and Elizabeth Browning.

I never saw such a boy as this before [he wrote] ; so slender, fragile and spirit-like—not as if he were actually in ill-health, but as if he had nothing to do with human flesh and blood. His face is very pretty and most intelligent, and exceedingly like his mother's. He is nine years of age, and seems at once less childlike, and less manly, than would befit that age. I should not quite like to be the father of such a boy, and should fear to stake so much interest and affection on him as he cannot fail to arouse. I wonder what

is to become him—whether he will ever grow to be a man—whether it is desirable that he should.

The reflection was an ingenuous one : at the same time, this impression, of a being too rarefied to survive, was shared by many of Hawthorne's contemporaries. Due as much to the romantic frailty of Elizabeth Barrett, as to the emphasis, in so poetic a relationship, on the marriage of true minds, it was from the first an accepted idea that the child of such a union was doomed to an early death. So congenial was this idea to Victorian sentiment, that when, in December 1849, Mrs. Browning published in the *Athenaeum* a poem called 'A Child's Grave in Florence,' she received at once letters of condolence from acquaintances and well-wishers in England. She tossed them indignantly on to the fire. 'What an idea !' she exclaimed. At that very moment, indeed, 'fat, strong, with double chins and rosy cheeks,' her son, who had succeeded in pulling down a heavy jug of water on top of him, was 'laughing like an imp' at the havoc he had created. Mrs. Browning took pen and paper and recorded the incident for the benefit of her friend, Miss Mitford. 'Is it not curious,' she wrote, 'that my child should be remarkable for strength and fatness ?' adding that Dr. Harding himself had told her that a more robust, or indeed a more beautiful, child he had never had under his care.

Unaware, meanwhile, of the speculations of his parent's friends, as of the real nature of the fate reserved for him, the golden-haired Penini lay lapped, like 'a little Bacchus' his father said, within the enclosed radiance, the serene domestic tenderness of a Florentine childhood. If the high-spirited Charles Lever found in the Browning *ménage* something oppressive and dank, if to the youthful Julian Hawthorne Mrs. Browning was 'a sort of miniature monstrosity' with 'no body to her . . . and a hand like a bird's claw,' there was, at least as far as the child was concerned, no lack of warmth, as of variety, in the facts of his early experience. With Wilson he rode to picnics on donkey-back, sitting with her amongst the mountain goats while his parents admired the view and ate pigeon-pie and ham : he tormented his rival and playmate, Flush, as severely as did the Casa Guidi fleas : he crawled after the tortoises that lived amongst the orange trees and camellias on the terrace, or stared speechless at the small snakes that Robert Browning liked to produce for his entertainment, out of the depths of his bosom. 'You are aware,' said Mrs. Browning, 'that that child I am more proud of than twenty "Aurora Leighs"'; and she delighted to adorn his frocks with muslin embroidery ; to garnish his hats, like those of the

Florentine princes, with feathers and with blue satin ribbons. Every evening, by the green Venetian blinds or over the pinewood fire she read poetry to him, while he sat acquiescent in her lap, from time to time putting up 'his little rosebud of a mouth to have a kiss.' For already, according to his mother, the sense of the beautiful was very strong in the child ; and her conviction is such that we are not surprised to hear that when first, at the age of two, he saw St. Mark's, in Venice, he 'threw up his arms in wonder, and then, clasping them around Wilson's neck, kissed her in an ecstasy of joy.'

Three times, during early childhood, this already complex structure of routine, of daily habit, was suddenly and forcibly dismantled. On each occasion, it was a journey to England that was involved. In the course of a few days, for no reason that he could understand, the ease and spaciousness of Casa Guidi gave place to three small rooms in a 'dingy London lodging' ; the dry elastic air of Florence was succeeded by 'heavy, damp, stifling English heat,' melons and grapes and figs by 'heavy, damp, stifling English dinners.' Of her first visit to her native land for five years Mrs. Browning wrote, 'I grew cold to the heart as I set foot on the ground of it, and wished myself away.' And almost at once, she began to cough. For to her, this return to an earlier set of circumstances placed a heavy pressure upon the most sensitive tissues of her emotional system. Not only was she confronted, once again, with the fanatical hostility of Mr. Moulton Barrett, but the morbid sensibility that festered in her on the subject of a beloved brother's death, was inflamed anew by the inevitable associations of family life. A further tax were the incessant social demands that were placed on the visiting couple. It was impossible 'to drink a cup of tea from beginning to end without an interruption from the doorbell' : without Mrs. Fanny Kemble calling to leave tickets for her Shakespearian reading, or Mr. Ruskin pressing them to drive out and inspect his collection of Turners at Denmark Hill. Exhausted, Mrs. Browning grew paler every day, while her husband, torn between the love of company and the need to protect his wife's health, alternated, openly at times, between moods of concern and of sudden, overpowering vexation.

To no one, however, was life in Devonshire Street more disconcerting than to the Italian-born Penini. He shrank ; he pined ; he wilted. Strange faces surrounded him, and strange customs : the children in Regent's Park made fun of his accent ; his cousin Altham, up from Somerset, looked scornfully at his frilled trousers and drooping ringlets. His Uncle George, his Uncle Occy, scanda-

lised to see a nephew of theirs dance, tambourine in hand, introduced him to a standard of conduct that centred around a knowledge of fisticuffs and the use of the word 'pluck.' Most terrible of all, Wilson had disappeared : Wilson who had never left him before, Wilson who had slept at his side from the moment of his birth, without a word to him had packed up her box and gone off to visit her mother in the West Riding. It was impossible, Mrs. Browning found, to calm the passion of tears, the 'deplorable grief,' with which he greeted the news of this departure. Nor was he to be consoled with picture books or the offer of a new paintbox. 'Sceptical about happiness, suspicious of complete desolation,' he attached himself to his mother, refusing to allow her to talk to visitors or to move out of sight for fear that she, too, would slip away and leave him alone amongst strangers. 'Really,' she sighed, 'it is too much sometimes.' For he clung about her skirts all day and would not go to bed at night unless, a substitute for Wilson, she lulled him to sleep in her arms. One night he started up on the pillows. At two o'clock in the morning, in 'a voice like an organ,' Mr. Tennyson, in the drawing-room, was reciting 'Maud' to his admirers.

And then, with the first fogs of autumn, the visit came abruptly to an end. Wilson was summoned, trunks were packed : Mrs. Browning scribbled off another fifty autographs ; she posted a farewell gift of malachite studs to her brother-in-law, Surtees, in Taunton. And the Browning family, with Wilson in attendance, set out once more for Italy. When, after long months of exile, Penini saw before him the streets and houses of Florence, his joy was moving to behold. As for his mother, it was with an exquisite sense of relief that she sank back upon the familiar sofa at Casa Guidi. 'I could turn myself on my pillow,' she wrote, 'and sleep here to the end of my life.' Robert Browning, on the other hand, found Florence 'dead and dull and flat.' He complained that there was 'no life, no variety' ; and seemed unaware, for the first time, of the pain his words inflicted.

Gradually, the echoes and repercussions of foreign travel died away. Casa Guidi reasserted its spell : by the quiet fireside, husband and wife relapsed into their 'former, soundless, stirless, hermit existence.' Together, they wrote poetry ; they read the Memoirs of Alexandre Dumas ; Mrs. Browning stitched frocks for her child or discussed, over the teacups, the latest manifestation of the rapping spirits. As for Pen, he appeared spontaneously to recover 'fire and flesh' in the air of his native Florence. And if he steadfastly refused to sleep at night unless Wilson sat in the

room beside him, his waking hours, at least, were free of the long shadow of insecurity cast, at dusk, by the memory of London. Now, not only was Wilson always at his side ; there was Wilson's husband, too. For, jilted by a member of the Ducal Guard, Wilson had very sensibly married the Brownings' manservant, Ferdinando Romagnoli. He was a 'good, tender-hearted man,' always ready to entertain, or to serve up a dish of cutlets for Pen's breakfast. Pen, for his part, would not move a step without the Romagnolis. He went to church with them : masked in blue satin, he followed them through the streets at carnival time : he sat between them at the open-air theatre, applauding the performance of monkeys and dogs in operatic tragedy. And it was in the friendly warmth of the kitchen that he sought refuge, at times, from certain disquieting influences at large in the drawing-room : from the spirit of Dante, for instance, who five times had pulled down his own picture from the wall ; or the experience of Mr. Story, of mediums who walked about in the air, their feet resting on the heads of the guests beneath ; not to mention the ordeal of Mr. Milner Gibson, whose dining-room table was in the middle of dinner lifted up to an angle of forty-five degrees—'he praying (or rather swearing) for leave to get his dinner in peace.'

The spirits apart, then, there was little to disquiet and much to divert in the circumstances of this Anglo-Italian childhood. And under the influence of so benign a climate, sheltered from the frost both of censure and of competition, this only child of celebrated parents developed over the years a singular bloom both of body and mind. His looks, his wit, his graceful manners were the admiration of all. Nor was it long before he began to deploy an astonishing array of talents. At the age of five he wrote poetry that his mother pronounced superior to her own ; at six he had already composed an opera ; at nine, he was reading French, German, Latin and Italian, and discussing over the breakfast table the literary merits of *Madame Bovary*. Robert Browning saw himself faced with the responsibility of bringing up what he could only describe as an 'infant wonder' : and Walter Savage Landor summed up the opinions and expectations of those who knew him, when he forecast that in the not so distant future there was to be, and to the gratification of all, 'a third great poet in the family.'

But all this promise, all this flowering of tenderness and talent, was to receive a sudden and catastrophic check. The blow fell without any warning whatsoever. For the recurrent ill-health of Mrs. Browning was too familiar a part of the pattern of life at Casa Guidi to disturb or alarm. And the attack she now suffered

was no different from the many that had preceded it, and from which, triumphantly in each case, she had recovered. It was entirely without preparation of any sort, therefore, that Pen awoke one morning to find the household in tears about him, and his mother, his 'dearest darlingest Ba,' lying dead on her pillows in the room next to his. From the contemplation of that spectacle, his friend Miss Blagden came to remove him; she took the bewildered boy under her care, and installed him in her villa at Bellosguardo. He remained with her until after the funeral. When he returned, he found Casa Guidi in the hands of the furniture removers: they were to leave Italy immediately and go and live in London. Robert Browning was resolute in his determination. 'Life must now be begun anew,' he said: 'all the old cast off and the new one put on': and from the manner in which he hastened on the arrangements for the departure, it was obvious that, for the poet at any rate, the break with Florence was to be in every sense a final one.

And so Pen went, for the last time, to see Wilson and Ferdinando in their little house under the wall of the city. Wilson had a new position now: she was housekeeper and guardian to the eighty-six-year-old Walter Savage Landor. Never again would she fashion Pen's ringlets for him, make knead cakes for his birthday, or sit beside his bed until he fell asleep at night. It was as if, in her, he lost a mother all over again. They sat hand in hand, openly weeping: Ferdinando, too, had difficulty in restraining his tears. The farewells were interrupted by a crash: impatient of the delay, Landor had plucked up the four corners of the tablecloth and slung it, plates and all, through the nearest window: and at that, unable any longer to endure the intensity of his own emotion, Pen fled, hurrying down the Via Nunziatina with the sound of sobs and breaking crockery re-echoing in his ears.

* * *

One grey afternoon in 1862, when a blustering wind was blowing the smoke of trains low over Paddington, the sofas and chairs and mirrors of Casa Guidi were carried in their crates through the narrow doorway of number 19, Warwick Crescent. Under Browning's direction, pictures and bookcases were placed in the position they were to occupy for the next twenty-five years, and that night Pen, at the top of the house, slept in the bed and amongst the furniture of his childhood's home in Florence. He awoke, not to the tolling of the San Felice bells, but to the whistle and hiss of engines; to the realisation that he was in London again; not,

this time, for a month or two, but for what might be the rest of his life. He got up and looked out of the window. On the other side of the canal, the roofs of Blomfield Road were sleek with rain : on the towpath beneath, a horse plodded, head nodding under the steady drizzle. Sneezing violently, Pen began to dress : he had a heavy cold in the head. He buttoned his shoes and went downstairs to the drawing-room, to see if his favourite copy of *Monte Cristo* had arrived with the other books from Casa Guidi. He opened the door. Standing in the centre of the room, as the removal men had left it, was an empty sofa. Pen looked at the faded cushions. And as he did so, the nature of his own loss was made overwhelmingly plain to him. For everything had been taken from him. His mother, Wilson, Florence, his childhood ; all had gone, and he was left stranded here ; imprisoned, henceforward, within the confines of a negative, an arrested existence. On the floor below, Robert Browning was eating porridge and reading the *Daily News*. Pen came in and took his place beside him. He did not say a word. The days of silence had begun.

' You know,' wrote Robert Browning shortly after his wife's death, ' I have her dearest interest to attend to *at once*—her child to care for, educate, establish properly . . . all just as she would require were she here.' The sincerity of the intention is evident : what is less acceptable, in effect, is his interpretation of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's expressed desires. For, like his mother, Pen had always identified himself, and in the closest possible way, with Italy : like her, he felt himself, indeed he proclaimed himself to be, not English but Italian. And what Browning now set out to do was consistently to undermine and suppress this attitude : an attitude which he had tolerated in his wife, but which he was not prepared to accept in his son. ' I distrust all hybrid and ambiguous natures and nationalities, and want to make something decided of him,' he wrote to his friend Story. There was no time to lose, he realised, for with every day that passed he ran the risk of missing ' the critical time when the English stamp (in all that it is good for) is taken or missed.' Systematically, therefore, the curls were clipped, the ' chatter of Tuscan ' silenced ; a tutor was engaged, ' sound to the core in grammatical niceties,' and the process of re-education began in earnest.

How successful it was to be, we can judge, over the course of the next few years, by indirect means only. For as he passes from the sunshine of Florence into the dim light of Maida Vale and the Harrow Road, Pen suffers, as a personality, an almost total eclipse : progressively, colour, gaiety, charm, all are extinguished, and with

them the poetic quality that had added such lustre to the years of his childhood. When we catch a glimpse of him now, it is in monochrome only : he is rowing his boat between the banks of the Paddington Canal, or saddling a pony in Blomfield Mews, or watching, a wan figure at the window, Robert Browning set out, top-hatted, for yet another dinner-party in town. We do not hear him speak ; he remains resolutely, obstinately silent, he whose voice has babbled so irrepressibly through every page of his mother's letters from Florence, Siena or Rome. Nor is he to be betrayed into self-revelation. When his former friend and playmate, Edith Story, sends him a present of a pair of slippers which she has made him, he reproaches her, in reply, for wasting her time on 'a stupid fellow like myself' ; adds a few comments on the state of the weather, and concludes abruptly, 'As I have nothing else to write that could possibly be interesting to you, I think that I had better shut up.'

It is obvious that Robert Browning was perturbed by this state of affairs. And it is obvious, too, with all his deep affection for his son, that he lacked any real insight into the nature of his condition. His letters reflect either bewilderment or exasperation : he is unable to understand how it is that his swan has changed, overnight, into so mute and inglorious a duckling. Pen, he complains continuously, is 'inordinately given to boating.' And again, 'Pen boats, cares more for that than aught else, unless perhaps for shooting and breech-loaders . . .' A few years elapse, and the dissatisfaction is more acute. 'He wants the power of working, and I give it up in despair.' For Browning had set his heart on Pen entering Balliol, under Jowett ; and Pen, within a month of matriculation, still refused to apply himself seriously to his books. Browning was nonplussed. He was convinced that Pen's natural abilities were, as he said, 'considerable' : why, then, this passive refusal to exploit his own powers ? 'He seems to me able to do many things for which at present he has little or no inclination. I want him to be what I think he may be : the next year or two will decide perhaps if I shall be disappointed or no.'

Disappointed in one respect he was to be. For Pen failed to get into Balliol : a failure that coincided narrowly with the honorary degree that Oxford chose at the same moment to confer upon his father. Such a combination of circumstances was painful to Browning. He seems, in consequence of it, to have developed an actual sense of guilt with regard to his son ; as if he had become conscious for the first time that his own stature cast a shade upon the other's growth. It was in atonement, perhaps, for this state of

affairs, which he had no power to remedy, that the poet devoted himself henceforward with so eager and unabashed a persistence to the enhancement of his son's career. He was ready to go to any lengths, even, as he said, to black people's boots for them, 'in the prospect of possible advancement to Pen': and of the sincerity of this statement the years to come were to provide, in one instance at least, a very singular and by no means creditable example.

By this time, Pen himself was at Christ Church, where, according to the unpublished diary of Alfred Domett, he appears to have made his mark 'more by the skill he showed at rowing and billiards than by any success in the University subjects of study.' This natural disinclination for work was accompanied in him by a marked taste for the luxuries of life: every other post brought to Warwick Crescent demands that were to prove a heavy tax upon the resources of an indulgent father. Robert Browning had been a widower, now, for close on ten years. His position as such was a curious one. The man who was born 'supremely passionate' had always been susceptible to the beauty of women, and they in their turn adored him, as Elizabeth Barrett Browning once remarked, 'far too much for decency.' For nearly ten years, now, the legend of Casa Guidi had imposed upon him an unnatural attitude, the constraint of which protected him both from his own inclinations and the presumption of others. And it was on terms such as these, at once intimate and detached, that he enjoyed at this time the friendship of Louisa, Lady Ashburton, a young widow, of whose dark and classical beauty both Henry James and Edwin Landseer have at different times recorded an echo. There is no doubt that Browning was attracted to her, and there is no doubt, too, that a well-established fortune possessed for him, in the circumstances, at least equal powers of attraction. The two factors combined, in the end, to win from him a proposal of marriage: but not before the legend had been propitiated, and Browning had informed the lady that, since his heart, as he said, 'was buried in Florence' and he could not for that reason profess to love her, she was to understand that 'the attraction of marriage to her lay in its advantage to Pen.'

Seldom can a beautiful woman have received, from a poet, so prosaic a proposition. That Lady Ashburton should, and in the most peremptory of terms, dismiss Browning from her presence, is wholly to be understood. What is less forgivable, it may be thought, is the vehemence of Browning's resentment; his subsequent allusions to a 'detestable,' a 'nauseating remembrance';

to 'that contemptible Lady Ashburton' whom he likened, in a letter, to a black beetle that had attempted to crawl into his sleeve. The experience was a painful one ; and it left its mark upon him : when Pen came down from Oxford that Christmas he found his father irritable and morose. One morning, while Pen was occupied in sketching a pet owl on its perch, Browning read out to him a letter he had received from Isa Blagden. She had been doing her best, she said, to assist Wilson, who, since the death of Walter Savage Landor, had lost her savings and was again without a job. Pen listened silently to these echoes, jangled now, of a bygone childhood. But Browning was impatient at the thought of Wilson becoming, as he said, 'a burthen' upon others. 'She is fit for little but the workhouse !' he exclaimed. The grey-eyed young man said nothing. There stirred within him at the words a resolution that, feeding on deprivation, had retained throughout the years an undiminished tenacity of purpose. This was not the moment, however, for self-revelation. He picked up his pencil and continued, in silence, to sketch.

When the sketch was finished it was put aside, with others, to show to Millais, who took a friendly interest in the details of Pen's career. For it had been decided that Pen had a career ; that he was to be a painter ; that in artistic, rather than in academic effort lay his future distinction. Millais had already pronounced Pen's drawing to be 'perfect.' Browning seized eagerly on the expression, seeing in it an assurance that the promise of childhood was, belatedly, to be fulfilled. Accordingly, Pen was packed off to Antwerp, to live in lodgings over a butcher's shop, and study four hours a day with the Belgian, Heyermans. Soon his pictures began to arrive home : a hare lying on a damask cloth ; an old man contemplating a skull ; a cobbler tapping nails into the sole of a shoe. Millais was warm in his praise : Rudolf Lehmann went one better : he offered Pen a hundred and fifty guineas for a study of a priest reading a book. 'One suspects,' wrote Browning's friend, Alfred Domett, 'a little *practical flattery* to the poet in all this.' Pen himself seems to have thought so, for when Millais advised him to send a picture to the Royal Academy, he had the 'good sense,' Domett says, to decline. Millais was right, however : the following year Pen sent up a large canvas, 'The Worker in Brass,' for which, on the advice of both Leighton and Millais, he asked a sum of three hundred pounds. 'The price,' comments Domett sourly, 'was somewhat extravagant, all things considered.' But the picture was sold, and even Domett was moved by the exuberance of Browning's joy in his son's success. He had gone

to infinite pains to ensure and supplement that success ; hiring an empty house in which to exhibit Pen's pictures, spending whole days in the uncarpeted rooms, personally receiving and doing the honours by every visitor that appeared, from Carlyle down to his own cook. . . . 'The eager, deferential solicitude,' wrote Sidney Colvin, 'with which this famous father would seek the opinions on the young man's work of those who were supposed to have some intelligence of such matters was a thing infinitely, and considering the mediocrity of the result, almost tragically touching.'

And then, when he least expected it, when the demands were at their heaviest and compensation more dilatory than ever, the burden of Pen's welfare was lifted all at once from Browning's shoulders. It is symptomatic of Pen's attitude that, despite the very real affection between them, he should have found it possible to conceal from his father an attachment of fourteen years' standing. Few things, Browning confessed, could have surprised him more than the announcement of his son's engagement : on the other hand, few things, as it turned out, could have pleased him better. For Miss Fannie Coddington had all the advantages and none of the disadvantages of her American origin. She was a discreet and well-conducted young woman in her thirties, who had recently inherited a considerable sum of money. In an interview with Browning, she spoke with 'the greatest frankness and generosity' of the means she would have of contributing to her future husband's 'support.' The wedding took place six weeks later in a small country church, dressed, for the occasion, with autumn leaves and flowers : and after a wedding breakfast at which Browning distinguished himself both by the eloquence of his address and by his feat in writing the Lord's Prayer in a circle the size of a shilling, the young couple left to spend a honeymoon abroad. Browning, meanwhile, had been openly rejoicing in the prospect of Pen and his wife 'taking up their abode,' as he put it, near him : as soon as they returned, he urged them to visit an excellent house, with studio attached, which was for sale in the immediate neighbourhood. Not for a moment did he anticipate the announcement which was to come. He stared incredulously into the face of Fannie Barrett Browning as she spoke. For it was Fannie who spoke. Pen, who had remained silent so long, could not, at so critical a moment, declare himself openly before his father. It was Fannie, then, who broke the news to Browning. It was Fannie who told the poet that, like his mother, Pen was well only 'when away from London' ; that he had never felt really at home in England ; that he had never felt happy, in fact, since he left Italy : and that it was his intention

now, an intention which no persuasion could alter, to leave England at once and go and settle for the rest of his life in the country which, secretively all this while, he had regarded in every respect as his native land.

* * *

It was on an evening of early summer that Mr. Henry James paid his first visit to the Palazzo Rezzonico, in Venice. In the big dimly-lit drawing-room, known as the Pope's Apartment, the windows were open on to the central courtyard of the Palazzo. Tilted from the wall, a gilt-framed mirror reflected the heavy tapestries that hung on the wall opposite ; it presented an oblique view of brass and silver lamps, of carved oak and massive gildings. In the arm-chair beneath, Mrs. Barrett Browning, frail, still, after a recent illness, sat against the cushions with her small dog, Max, in her lap. A plump middle-aged man with a drooping moustache, Mr. Barrett Browning, hustled about the room, offering, with the teacups, a plate of knead cakes, newly baked, he said, by their maid Wilson, a Yorkshirewoman who had once seen service with the Barrett family in Wimpole street. He sat discussing with his visitor the improvements he had made in the Palazzo ; the desecrated chapel which he had restored in honour of his mother ; the niche he had built to hold the marble bust that was his friend Storey's tribute to her memory. Presently the door opened, and an elderly manservant, Ferdinando they called him, brought in a dish of strawberries with cream : they sat eating the sugared fruit while their host told them of the recent purchase of Casa Guidi, his early home ; as well as of his intention of securing, for summer residence, a house in Asolo, where Robert Browning wrote his last poems. One thing he did not discuss : his refusal to allow his mother's body to be taken out of Italy at a moment when the proposition was put forward that it should rest in marital proximity to that of her husband, within the walls of Westminster Abbey.

Upon his return to the Palazzo Barbaro, where he was staying, Mr. Henry James recorded his impressions of the evening. He spoke of the beauty of the Rezzonico—that stately temple of the rococo—and, less enthusiastically, of the ‘beautiful, cold, pompous interior, partly peopled though the latter be, in its polished immensity, by every piously kept relic of Casa Guidi and of London years.’ He was impressed with the scope and justice of Pen’s improvements. ‘It is altogether royal and imperial,’ he said ; ‘but,’ he added, ‘Pen isn’t kingly, and the *train de vie* remains to be seen. Gondoliers ushering in friends from pensions won’t fill it out.’

For Henry James had recognised, without necessarily approving, the social presumption that underlay the purchase of the Rezzonico. What, surprisingly, he failed to detect there, or perhaps simply to record, were all the symptoms, convincingly displayed, of a typically Jamesian situation. Above the civilities he exchanged with his American hostess he might have perceived, had he chosen to, the true rôle of a woman who had inherited, with Elizabeth Barrett Browning's jewellery, her languorous attitude on a sofa : he might have noted the significance, not alone of 'every piously kept relic' of Casa Guidi—every picture, book, chair and jealously hoarded trifle—but of the aged manservant who forty years before had carried the child Penini in his arms ; of the grey-haired Wilson herself, whose presence at his side had illumined that child's days, and, where fear intruded, added the seal of protection to his nights. He might have discovered, thus, in the circumstances at the Rezzonico, an example of an adherence to the past, which, unrelinquished over the years, had succeeded in the astonishing feat of reassembling under the prosaic light of day every ingredient, spiritual and material, in a situation whose relevance belonged, now, to the sphere of memory alone.

* * *

On May 9th, 1912, the small town of Asolo was celebrating the centenary of the birth of Robert Browning. From the Casa Scotti, when the ceremonies were due to begin, there emerged a carriage drawn by two white horses. In this, propped up on cushions and with a rug over his knees, sat an elderly man whose darkened glasses protected his eyes from the sun. Robert Barrett Browning had been very ill, now, for many months. His paint brushes lay idle in his studio ; his Arab horses languished in the stables, unexercised except by the grooms. Today, however, he had insisted on getting up and driving once more through the streets and squares he knew so well. As he looked at the familiar faces about him, he thought of one that he would not see again : he thought of Elizabeth Wilson, the timid young girl from the West Riding of Yorkshire, who had signed the register at the marriage of Robert Browning to Elizabeth Barrett ; who had received their infant son in her arms ; and who slept now under a white marble cross in the cemetery of Santa Anna, in Asolo. The carriage turned into the square where the mayor was waiting to receive it. Despite their pleasure in the occasion, there was something subdued about the enthusiasm of the onlookers. For it was obvious to those who saw him that the year in which they celebrated

the birth of Robert Browning was to be the year, too, in which they mourned the death of his only son.

Two months later, under the blazing July sunshine, another procession set forth from the gates of the Casa Scotti. This one turned, not towards the centre of the town, but to the cemetery of Santa Anna di Asolo. And here Robert Wiedeman Barrett Browning was laid to rest in the soil of the country he loved. There was about the occasion a sense of fitness not altogether perceptible, perhaps, to those who came that day to mourn him. Nowhere else in the world could the son of Casa Guidi have discovered a deeper repose. For once again, as he slept, Wilson was at his side.

Sir George :

Extracts from an Autobiography

BY OSBERT SITWELL

IN Great Morning I took leave of the reader at the palmist's, in November 1914 . . . Even when my father and I were on the worst of terms, he would favour me with his views on the war in talk or by letter. Though, if it were in conversation, the discourse must not be allowed to go on for too long, since he possessed in the highest degree the art of squeezing the life out of an hour and of making it drag its weary length along, nevertheless a short ten minutes on a subject impersonal, and not entirely confined to the errors of his children, was always a delight. The nonconformity of the opinions he aired was exhilarating, albeit, of course, he was so far carried away by the consciousness of frustration and futility that must haunt all individuals, as opposed to units, caught in an age of democratic wars, that often plainly he trespassed across the borders of common sense in an opposite direction. Moreover, he was a little prejudiced, by his love of German medieval art, and because the Kaiser, on account of his family pride, his similar interests, and, perhaps, because, too, he claimed to be an authority on nearly every subject, had always been a hero to him. Indeed, the two men bore some resemblance to each other, physically as well as in mind (they had been born on the same day of the same month, though a year divided them in age, the Kaiser having been born on the twenty-seventh of January 1859, my father on the twenty-seventh of January 1860) and as they grew older and adopted beards, this likeness emphasised itself : but I do not know if my father was aware of it . . . Ever since the war broke out, then, he had pursued his own line about its origin and conduct, and had remained firm in his attitude until the end, often becoming a dupe, as he was wont to do, of his own propaganda : (a habit which finally made him liable to the propaganda of others, too ; so that after the war he changed, and adopted a new bellicose, contemporary-newspaper attitude towards Germany). Thus, as early as the day after war was declared, he wrote from Renishaw to me in London :

I don't blame the Germans. I think the Czar's want of judgement has brought this upon Europe—unless, indeed, it was Russian statecraft to force Germany into war . . . I fancy the Kaiser spoke truly when he said the

sword was being forced into his hand . . . However, this reading of the situation will be very unpopular at the present moment.

And, as late as August 8, 1918, before the sudden swelling of the Allied fortunes, he was writing :

. . . We are told we are fighting for the triumph of democracy, which has so managed the affair that we could hardly expect to get at this moment the status quo ante terms we could have obtained after the first battle of the Marne. But what we have really been fighting for, of course, during these last three years is the triumph of Bolshevik principles in England—bound to come if war continues much longer. Everyone of sound military judgement knew at the beginning of the war that we could not hope to break completely the military strength of Germany : we could, however, without ruining civilisation, as we have already done, have made Germany accept peace without spoils, which would have meant popular reforms in Germany, and have kept Russia alive as a counterpoise. Now we have got to the gambler's last stake, and must go on for a time on the chance that Germany may go Bolshevik first.

'Everyone of sound military judgement' meant, of course, himself, the former Adjutant of the Volunteer Regiment he had commanded, and the omniscient Major Viburne, who had been staying at Renishaw when the war broke out. At any rate, from the first moment my father had begun resolutely, and almost with unction, to prepare for the worst. He threw his gothic imagination into this, as formerly, into the more decorative aspects of life, with real abandon : but his frame of mind varied. In some moods he would make notes on the various projects he had not yet had time to undertake—life, he noticed was beginning to sweep him past at a great pace, though I doubt if he or any victim really can estimate fully the speed of his transit—and meant, directly the war was over, to embark upon : in other moods he would allow his forebodings an equally full play. Personal, no less than national, ruin loomed : (that was true, but he did not comprehend the kind or direction). By August the 10th, 1914, not a week after war had broken out, he had already made certain plans for preserving his family and belongings ; he wrote from Renishaw :

If the Germans come over, I think of sending your mother and Sachie to the Peak, and shall stay to dismantle Renishaw of tapestry, pictures and china . . . If the Germans don't come over, we may let Wood End for several months, and go into lodgings at Scarborough.

The pattern, however, did not work out quite as he designed it. And the family—that is to say my father and mother, for family

and household were both much dispersed—settled itself once more at Wood End in November 1914. Edith had now established herself in a small top-floor flat in Bayswater (in spite of its size, for many years it became a centre in London for painters, musicians, writers, and especially for young poets), Sacheverell was at Eton. Henry Moat had, the reader may recollect, left my father's service in April 1913, this constituting the longest of his absences. On leaving he had applied at the agencies for a job, stating, as one of his qualifications, that he spoke 'five languages including Yorkshire.' Eventually he had found a very well-paid situation, which he thought would suit him, as butler to a rich, retired fur-merchant in Hampstead. His employer, however, proved to have a temper of the most violent oriental kind, and in reply to furious verbal assaults, sprinkled with inopportune foreign turns of phrase, but all accusing him of breaches of the decorum of major-domodom, Henry would remain calm, and then with his immense butler's dignity, which he could assume like a robe of office, would observe : 'You must remember, sir, I'm accustomed to the gentry.'

He did not, in truth, ever grow used to the ways of the house, and in consequence, as soon as the war broke out, had joined the Army Service Corps. Poor Robins, who had replaced him, had been recalled to his regiment early in August, and had gone abroad with the First Expeditionary Force. At the moment, he was in France, under peculiar circumstances : for, having evaded capture for a month, he was living behind the German lines, with the other survivors of the same troop. Eventually, early in December, they were obliged to give themselves up, in order not to compromise those persons who had provided them with food and shelter, chief of whom was the heroic Princess de Croy. Next, they were taken to Germany, court-martialled, and the majority of them, including Robins, were sentenced to be shot. It was only at the very last moment, when they were lined up for execution in the yard, that a reprieve came, suddenly and without reason.

In the house, then, Pare alone remained, of all my former friends ; Pare to whom day and night were the same and brought nothing but work and sadness. He still was not allowed to visit his mad wife, whose condition had seemed to worsen every year. The servants who had replaced those who had left were foreign : a Swiss footman, a French maid. But Scarborough itself, the town and the people, were unchanged in most respects, though the town was full, and busy with a military activity new to it. I had a good many letters from my mother and father, Miss Lloyd and Major Viburne, and could, as a result, piece together what was happening

there. Miss Lloyd, now growing into a very old lady, had taken upon herself—as might have been expected—innumerable labours on behalf of the local young men who had volunteered for service. In addition to these tasks occupying most of the day—cooking, knitting, sending parcels—she had fallen a little under the spell of the then epidemic spy-mania, which always intoxicates and renders its victims happy by allowing them to exaggerate their own importance in the contemporary scene. And this, in turn, threw upon her more work, for it necessitated her remaining, for at least half an hour at a time, in the bow-window of her drawing-room, with the brass and shagreen telescope she had inherited from her uncle (to me, though never seen, a figure familiar from my earliest infancy, and legendary in scale albeit slightly misty; ‘Oncle,’ a character who had been a friend of Charles Dickens, and a sea-captain, though sometimes, in the heat and excitement of conversation, which with her acted on a subject like a magnifying glass, raised to the dignity of owning a yacht)—with her telescope, then, clapped to her eye, searching the wide seascape for the periscopes of German submarines, and the convergence of streets below her house for disguised ‘Huns.’ And she would, indeed, make amazing discoveries, since half-coconuts and bits of fat were still suspended in the window-box for hungry beaks to peck at, and in consequence she would sometimes, with the aid of the lens, misinterpret the distance of the scurry of wings immediately below, and read instead of it a distant naval engagement, which would leave her in a temporary vain agony of disquiet . . . What could they be? A new form of boat, of aircraft, perhaps; real devils, those Huns! But no, it was only the dear little blue-tits again! Nor did her duties terminate with the day, for often at two or three in the morning, she would creep to the window to look for Germans (and one never knew now who were or were not Germans), signalling out to sea, giving their chiefs news of the latest Rectory Sale of Work or Scout Jamboree. (They were so methodical and devoted to detail that nothing, she held, was too trivial for them to notice.)

To Major Viburne, too, now well over eighty years of age, the war had brought new interests, new life. While it was true that he had, together with all the other old gentlemen in clubs, long foreseen the struggle coming, it was equally not to be denied that his own military experience had been limited. Long ago, I had been present in the pantry at Renishaw when a footman who had been startled during dinner by Major Viburne’s tales of his own martial prowess had asked Henry :

'Excuse me, Mr. Moat, sir, but in what war did the Major see service ?'

Henry had replied, to the young man's complete satisfaction :
' My lad, the old boy served right through the Canteen Campaign, from start to finish ! '

And so it was that now ancient memories stirred in him, memories of other wars—of which he had read in other newspapers. It can be imagined how frequent and how free were the advice and exhortations he lavished upon the somnolent forms of fellow-elders in the Gentlemen's Club ; sometimes, again, one of them would rouse himself and similarly address the Major, when he, too, was asleep in his armchair, dreaming of the days when he had been Captain Commandant of Scarborough Castle. When awake, or not talking, he was reading *Caesar's Commentaries* again, which somehow made the present war seem so much more vivid.

My mother's troubles appeared at this moment to have taken a turn for the better, even to have dispersed. First of all my cousin, Irene Denison, had on her own initiative and without the advice of her parents or mine made a most gallant effort, at a sacrifice of part of her own fortune, to save my mother before it should prove too late. Next November my mother went up to London for a few days, for a lawsuit that Messrs. Lewis & Lewis were conducting on her behalf against Julian Field. She won it, was triumphantly vindicated, and the action exposed his dealings. Yet she was still unhappy and agitated—though perhaps agitated is not the correct word, for in the daytime she averted her mind from her troubles, which returned to haunt her only at night.

My father was immersed in his usual interests, and on December 8th wrote to me from Scarborough :

I don't think I told you I am turning the Ladies' Room at the Renishaw Park Golf Club into a locker-room. It will be so much better for them to have as a sitting-room the cottage beyond—which will open into the passage. This will make a splendid room, two storeys of windows, a coved plaster roof and a south aspect. I think I shall put up in it the 16th-century chimney-piece, as it may as well be there till it is wanted elsewhere, as lying about . . . I have been busy getting copies of wills for the family history. Mary Revell, who was a Sitwell, in 1670, John Milward, who was Francis Sitwell's brother-in-law, in 1679, Hercules Clay, who was Ann Sitwell's grandfather, in 1685 ; and Mrs. Kent, who was her step-mother, in 1687. . . . Mrs. Revell had a table-carpet in her bedroom, but no floor-carpet. John Milward leaves his hawks and spaniels to one friend, except his setter-dog, Lusty, whom he leaves to another . . . I have been working, too, at old costume. The modern coat was only invented about 1670-5 : before that

it was doublet, waistcoat and breeches. In this way, I think I have been able to date the picture of old Derby . . .

So things were going, until the morning of my last day in England before I left for the Front—the same morning that Germans came over the North Sea and chose to bombard Scarborough!

The noise of the great naval guns thumping and crashing through the mist, which magnified the sound, was enormous. It was about 8.15 A.M., my father was just dressing, and lost no time in finishing the process and getting downstairs. A piece of shell went through the front door, pierced a wooden pillar (part of the elaborate Edwardian decoration he had installed) and then buried itself in the smaller hall, while many fragments penetrated into the house. The Swiss footman went upstairs, and watched the attack from the roof. My mother, who was in bed when the bombardment took place, refused to move : but half an hour later, after it had just stopped, she rose, dressed, and, in order to see me before I left England the next morning, caught a train, unusually crowded, to London. Her maid supervised the luggage, but my mother personally took charge of a rather heavy piece of shell, which she was anxious to give me as a mascot. She entered my sister's flat, where I was having tea, and pressed her offering into my hands, saying:

'Here you are, darling ! I've brought it with me specially, for you to take to France. I'm sure it'll bring you luck !'

My father had taken refuge, with the rest of the household, except my mother and the footman, in the cellar ; though, as will appear in a moment, he had found a more dignified name for it. In those days he still possessed no motor, and so when, as soon as the German ships had sheered back into the grey vapour that separated our two countries, he emerged into daylight again—but cautiously, since he feared that the retreat might be a ruse ; the object of a new raid, if it occurred, being in his opinion the determination of the enemy fleet to secure himself as a hostage—, he sent immediately for his medical attendant of many years' standing. When the doctor entered the room, my father said to him, without preface :

'Dr. Mallard, if the Germans come back, I shall need your motor to drive me to York.'

'But what will happen if Mrs. Mallard wants it, Sir George ?' the poor man asked despairingly.

'I'm afraid I really can't help that !' my father snapped at him, and allowed a look to show plainly his disgust at other people's selfishness.

Meanwhile his power of fantasy had set itself to work on another

plan for the moment when the emergency he foresaw should arise : an alternative of which he often told me in later years in example of the heroic lengths to which he would have gone and could go. . . . A little way beneath the western, tall, brown-brick wall of our garden, in the depths of the Valley, as it was called, a wooded public pleasance, with a road running through it, lay a small but rather elongated shallow pool, carrying in its centre a diminutive island where elegiac trees drooped over the water. In the middle of this rose a rustic thatched hut of the '60's, fashioned of wood that still retained in places its bark as a shelter for earwigs, while the outside—and inside—of the cabin was much discoloured by bird-droppings : for it was the home and haunt of many water-birds. Hither my father proposed to wade or swim, or, who knows, perhaps proceed by some private method of funambulation, should he be surprised in Scarborough by the returning Germans and unable to make a get-away in Dr. Mallard's motor. In this idyllic retreat he had determined to hide during the Captivity, residing there, a Wild Man of the Weeping Willows, living among—and I suppose upon—the ducks and other decorative fowl to which in more peaceful times it was abandoned.

'I should have been quite happy, too,' he would comment at the end of a disclosure of his plans in after years, 'with a few books down from time to time from the London Library.' And then, he would add the familiar reproof, '*I never allow myself to feel bored!*'

Of this Red Indian's dream of his, he did not inform me at once by letter. (It might be dangerous to me as well ; the Germans were sure to steam open his letters, and by that means would find out that I had gone abroad.) But he told Sacheverell of it during the Christmas holidays. Nor did he allow his fears to prevent him from writing to me of other things : for when I reported to the Adjutant in the front-line trenches, only two days after the bombardment of Scarborough, I was at once handed a letter from my father ! I read it later, by myself, and was startled out of the dull melancholy that had settled on me when I arrived—at the first sight of the flying fountains of dead earth, the broken trees and mud, and at the first sounds, growing ever more ominous as one drew nearer to the bumping and metallic roaring which resembled a clash of comets—by the sheer fun of its contents.

Wood End, Scarborough. 16th December, 1914.

MY DEAREST OSBERT

As I fear a line sent to Chelsea Barracks may not reach you before you leave tomorrow, I write to you, care of your regiment, B.E.F., so that

you may find a letter from me waiting for you when you arrive in the trenches. But I had wanted if possible to give you a word of advice before you left. Though you will not, of course, have to encounter anywhere abroad the same weight of gunfire that your mother and I had to face here—it has been my contention for many years that there were no guns in the world to compare for weight and range with the great German naval guns, and that our own do not come anywhere near them—yet my experience .may be useful to you. Directly you hear the first shell, retire, as I did, to the Undercroft, and remain there quietly until all firing has ceased. Even then, a bombardment, especially as one grows older, is a strain upon the nervous system—but the best remedy for that, as always, is to keep warm and have plenty of plain, nourishing food at frequent but regular intervals. And, of course, plenty of rest. I find a nap in the afternoon most helpful, if not unduly prolonged, and I advise you to try it whenever possible.

Ever your loving father,
GEORGE R. SITWELL.

Undercroft was a word new to me, and it was some time before I discovered with what trisyllabic majesty the simple word cellar had clothed itself.

* * *

To avoid altercations, and because the unhappiness my parents caused, and the contemplation of their own unhappiness, responsible for it, might have attained to the quality of tragedy, the technique to be applied was bound to be farcical, for farce lowers the temperature and reduces proportions . . . First, I will take the most gross example of the kind of incident that resulted.

In January 1922, my father was in London and asked me to come and see him. Wise from experience, I knew that the interview he proposed could only lead to further trouble between us, for he was in a most intransigent mood. But I could hardly refuse to meet him. In consequence, I made the excuse that I was ill. (This seemed serviceable, because it was most improbable that we should meet by chance, and if we did, it was, I knew, still more unlikely that he would recognise me.) He replied, on Monday of the week in question, that he would call on me at 5 P.M. on Saturday. . . . In the days which followed I forgot both my alleged illness and my father's proposed visit, and on the afternoon he had selected, I had gone, quite unperturbed, to tea with Jean de Bosschère, at the other end of London. He lived in Bayswater, in one of those streets that are peculiar to our great city : long streets where identical yellow-brown houses, each with an identical projecting pillared portico, of a magnificence unrelated to its surroundings, face one another in an eternity of yellow fog. Standing under the canopy supported by Doric columns, you saw, if you looked opposite,

what might be a dim reflection in a fly-blown mirror, while if you glanced sideways, between the pillar and the house, an even more astounding vista of apparently reflected space, thus divided, greeted you. That way lay infinity, as well as eternity. However, I rang the bell, someone answered, and soon I was inside. My host, wearing as usual the lace jabot, brown velvet coat, knee-breeches, silk-stockings and buckled shoes that, in the years of the First World War, made him so vivid if singular a phantom as he bicycled through the London streets, was entertaining various friends—among them Aldous—and I soon forgot the cheerless, formalised depression outside. Alas, before many minutes had passed, I remembered something. All at once, at 4.30, as though a bell had struck in my mind, I recollected the immediate menace of my father's visit. Dashing out into the growing January dusk that seeped from sky and ground, and squeezed between the pillars and the houses, I found the street empty of human life as an early canvas by Chirico, nothing but pillar after pillar, railing after railing, and a few distant, decapitated bodies walking under the wet circular extinguishers of their own umbrellas.

In those days, I walked very fast, and since it was obviously hopeless to wait for a passing vehicle, I set out at once to cross London on foot, and reached Carlyle Square with only five minutes to spare, for my father was always punctual. I tore off my mackintosh and raced upstairs. . . . Alas, the door-bell rang before I had been given time to undress. Hastily removing my wet shoes, and ruffling my hair, I threw myself, still panting from the exertions of the past half-hour, into my bed, arriving in it just as my father opened the door. No doubt I appeared to be very feverish. Fortunately, Mrs. Powell never lost her nerve. Showing my father upstairs, she had remarked :

'Sir George, the doctors do not wish anyone to remain with the patient for more than five minutes. I will notify you when your time is up.'

My father entered, seated himself in a chair, and regarded me, as I lay there, clutching my bed-clothes up to my chin, as in a French farce (for if I let go of them, he would see I was fully dressed), and wearing upon my face, no doubt, a wild expression.

'I'm afraid I hadn't realised, dear boy, how ill you were !' he remarked, 'but I hope it's only nerves.' Here he extended a finger towards my neck, to feel the heat of my skin ; but I clutched the bed-clothes all the tighter, and had an inspiration.

'The doctors can't make out what is the matter with me,' I said. 'They've had several cases like it. Apparently, it's infectious !'

My father pushed his chair back and got up with a jump. He uttered hastily the words :

'Well, I'm afraid I must be getting back now—so much to do !' and left the room, long before Mrs. Powell could return to usher him out. Indeed, almost before I had finished saying goodbye, I had heard the front-door slam behind him.

In order to prevent this kind of occurrence, and other constant interruptions and interferences, it appeared absolutely necessary for Sacheverell and myself to absent ourselves from London for fully half the year, and to leave no address behind us. With this object in view, we ordered a supply of special writing-paper, of which for many years we made frequent use. Engraved on it at the right-hand corner was the name of an imaginary yacht, *S.Y. Rover*, and opposite this it carried a burgee, showing a skull and crossbones in white, on a black ground. By this means we could always reach my father by post, if so we wished, for we could write to him from where we were staying for the autumn and winter months, explaining that our friend Jonah's yacht had 'just put in' at Ostend or Naples or Athens, or wherever it might be—and that we had 'come on here for a few days' rest, while the craft is being overhauled.' We would add, 'In the meantime, dearest father, do not trouble to answer until we can give you an address. Our next stopping-place is uncertain, and the letter will only be lost.' The singular contradiction about this particular adapting of items from the classical repertory of farce was that two young men had to employ subterfuge against their stern father, not in order to shirk daily toil or to spend money lavishly, or to disguise the fact that they were living with the most shrill and gilded of mistresses, but merely in order to exist more quietly and cheaply than they would have been able to do at home, and to work hard at their profession ! . . . This paradox imparted to the whole machinery a curious twist.

Occasionally, of course, plans miscarried. Amalfi¹ constituted our first-chosen and much-loved refuge, and we would stay there for many months in the Cappuccini. This hotel, which until a century before had been a monastery, belonged to the same proprietor who owned at Cava de' Tirreni, some thirty miles away, the hotel in which all English travellers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century stopped a night, on their way from Pompeii to visit the then newly identified temples at Pestum, or on their return thence to Naples. Don Alfredo Vozzi, the great-grand-

¹ The reader will find a fuller account of Amalfi and the Hotel Cappuccini in *Distussions on Travel, Art and Life* (Grant Richards, 1925).

son of the first owner of the two hotels, was accustomed, therefore, by heredity to the ways of English travellers—he understood them. The employment of members of the same family in one profession over a long period seems naturally to produce physically an aristocratic type, and with his pointed beard, deep-set, sunken eyes with hooded upper lids, his aquiline nose, and his air of melancholy and distinction, he was no exception to this rule. He lived in the hotel, and occupied as his sitting-room a cell in the precise middle of the building. Its walls could not be seen for the number of pictures hanging on them: small paintings of the Neapolitan neighbourhood, executed in the romantic yet factual idiom of the so-called *Scuola di Posillipo*, which had flourished in Naples from 1820 to 1850. Here, with a large brass bowl of red-hot ashes standing on the cement floor, to give warmth to the place, Don Alfredo would pass the winter days, seldom going out—and never if there was a wind, for it afflicted his nerves, he said. So, though still wearing round his shoulders a large, thick, knitted, dark green shawl, folded like a rug, instead of pacing the terraces as he did in the summer, he would sit now by the door of his room on a small, rather elegant wooden settee or sofa, which just fitted the wall space, and would smoke endlessly very rank Toscana cigars, or occasionally indulge in the vague, quasi-philosophical, quasi-poetic but sonorous generalisations so dear to the cultivated Italian mind, ‘L'uomo è vittima del Destino,’ or ‘La volontà delle Donne è come la volontà dei fiori.’ But, in spite of his gentleness, an air of authority penetrated to every corner of the hotel from this, its nerve centre. Even as he talked of man and his fate, one ear was listening, one eye was watching with inherited skill. Suddenly—for the glass door was always open—he would call or just clap his hands, and the passage would all at once be full of hurrying housemaids, and swarthy porters and valets. There was something about him, in fact, of both the patriarch and the *grand-seigneur*, and he thoroughly comprehended the character of his own hotel, and refused, until circumstances compelled him, to modernise it.

At that time, no lift had been installed, and since the hotel hung high up on the cliff-side, a visitor could only reach it by climbing three hundred steps, or by allowing himself to be carried by two men in a chair. This remoteness from the world, and the absence of central heating, helped to keep it comparatively empty in the winter, when it became to my mind an ideal place for writers. The simple lines of the old white building, fitting into this fantastic landscape of mountain and sea, of painted villages poised on crags, of broken towers and castles of stone, of huge limestone cliffs, with

natural caves and grottoes and, here and there, the likeness of a window in the rock, of flying buttresses and turrets and sheer walls, as neatly as a snail does into a crevice ; the *belvedere*, on a long gently curving terrace high placed on glittering, impregnable rocks, scattered over, from November till March, with jonquils ; above all, the view, the unrivalled view of sea and distant mountains, and over these at all hours, in heat or cold, the light of Neapolitan skies, bursts of light from behind clouds, or torrents of light from a crystal-clear dome, light reflected from rocks and sea, and never playing twice the same variations on its themes of vertical and horizontal, of mass and plane, the dazzling celestial cities built of a stormy morning, when through the *sirocco*—a leaden day lined with gold, but with all its interest concentrated in the heavens and not on the earth, where roll scents of orange and myrtle—, there, on the horizon, a water-spout could be seen whirling, like a witch on a broomstick, at a pace the eye could not credit, across the waters toward the town, and, as you watched, the light again created new cities on the mountains, and above them great castles, metropolises of giants, whose tread now you began to hear, striding across from hill to hill, peaks beyond the reach of man, yet inhabited, and many fragments and repetitions of the Tower of Babel reared themselves up, gleaming, until the flashing of a gold lance broke them, and they dissolved into sound and water, water falling everywhere, on sea, on cliff, on terrace, on the world—all these features and effects made Amalfi to me a place of excitement and of inspiration.

I must emphasise, moreover, that the landscape affected me in a way in which no other has except my own. It made some deep personal appeal, sought to enforce some claim. Directly I had seen it, when I first stayed there as a boy of nineteen in 1912, I had at once felt with the landscape, and with its people, too, this deep sympathy : (the same lure, perhaps, had called hither from their frozen seas and tangled mists the Norman invaders of nearly a thousand years before). During this first visit a glimpse of the future had asserted, or insinuated, itself, as it sometimes does, and though I had then entertained no suspicion that I should ever become an author, the knowledge had filled me that one day I should return here to spend much time engaged in a task that afforded me a sense of completeness—and, in fact, much of my earlier work was written here. No doubt the monastic air still retained by the Cappuccini, the atmosphere of peace emanating from its ancient, rustic cloister of Saracenic arches, painted a flashing white which gathered to itself all colours, would have helped any artist in his work.

I was aware that my father also liked Amalfi, but now when he came to Italy, his plans for the restoration of Montegufoni, no less than his fears of putting a strain upon his heart by having to climb so many steps—for he resented having to pay five lire to be carried—rendered a visit to it unlikely from him. In time the phantom *Rover* had begun to wear a little thin, and in 1922 Sacheverell and I abandoned it temporarily, and for the sake of variety, in favour of a mythical invitation to explore Asia Minor with a party of excavators. (Even this antiquarian plan did not recommend itself to my father.) Posts would be uncertain, we had explained: better to write no letters. We had then gone straight to Amalfi and begun work. . . . We were, respectively, progressing with it fairly well when one evening a feeling of suspense began to darken the air. What could it be? William Walton was staying with us. He spent most of the time by himself in a room containing a typical South-Italian piano—similar to those upon which, as you pass beneath in the street of a southern Catholic city, you hear young girls practising, high up, from iron-barred convent windows. Here he would sit composing and copying out at a large table facing a window on the cloister, the whiteness of which in the sun filled the smoky air with a redoubled and spectral light; he would hardly move except to go to the window-ledge from time to time, where he would cut a Toscana cigar in two with a safety-razor blade he kept for that purpose. He smoked these half-cigars almost always as he wrote. Even William, then, who had not seen us for many hours, admitted in the evening that he also had felt some influence. It soon explained itself. At dinner, the German manageress came up to us and said:

'The herr director at La Cava, he has joos telephone to say a big English Barone arrive here tomorrow mit servant, and we are to kill first thing in the morgen fourteen chicken.'

To us the meaning of this esoteric message was clear. The news of the immolation—for so to a stranger it must have sounded, a sacrifice such as that ordained by Cetawayo or some other paramount Zulu chieftain—gave to those initiated the clue. In the French phrase, it signalled my father's approach. Especially in Southern Italy, where meat is always of an incomparable hardness of flesh, the killing and eating of chickens had become part of the System. They had to be slain as early as possible, otherwise they, too, would be tough, in which case my father, with a sigh, would push the plate away, saying in a voice of tragedy, 'Troppo fresco per me!' . . . The stories on which I was engaged, *Triple Fugue*, and Sacheverell's *All Summer in a Day*, had to be thrown aside and

hidden while we held a council. Fully interpreted or de-coded, the words of the Manageress had told us, then, that my father was sleeping the night at La Cava, an hour away by motor, and was coming here some time the following day, accompanied by Robins, for a visit of at least a week ; each chicken being the token of a luncheon or a dinner. . . . It would be of no avail to try to escape : it was too late, he would be sure to find out, and it would only look discourteous. The sole line of action open to us was to pretend to be expecting him, to have come here on purpose, and give him a touchingly warm welcome. In support, the spectral *Rover*, only just dismantled, would have to be brought out of dock again. The owner had changed his mind, we decided, and had persuaded us to board her at Naples, preparatory to a cruise in the Pacific. And hearing that my father might spend a week at Amalfi, we had come here on the chance of seeing him, and to rest for a few days beforehand. (He never objected to the idea of rest : but if you had mentioned that you were at work on a book, a look of intense concern would immediately be seen to fix itself on his face, and he would issue, in a tone suggesting that you were proposing something rash beyond hardihood, such as trying to swim the Atlantic for a wager, one of his customary and familiar warnings : ‘Oh, I shouldn’t do that if I were you ! You’d better drop the idea at once. My cousin Stephen Arthington had a friend who utterly ruined his health writing a novel ! ’)

No one knew at what time he was to be expected : but we were aware that he liked early hours, so it was better to be on the watch almost from sunrise. It proved a tiring day. All the morning we hung out of the loggias of our rooms, ready to wave enthusiastic greetings, our eyes straining at the immense and classic view ; albeit on this occasion not for its beauty, though it was a perfect and typical October day of the South, strayed from the fold of summer, and far away, beyond the multi-coloured sea, mosaiced by the tides and little shifting of the sand, by the clearness, too, of the water, that showed just the same degree of transparency in blue and green and purple and gold that is to be observed in the great mosaics of Cefalù and Monreale and other churches of the old kingdom of which this had been part, lay the thin girdle of gold and silver—of sand and foam—which divides the sea there from the land, culminating in the range of mountains, Mont’ Alburno towering over them, its rocky bulk, owing to its bareness, catching again all the colours of sea, sky and air, and, as it were, presenting a kind of summary of them. No, our gaze was reserved for the road, which, here and there, could be seen ribboning its way precariously

above precipices. When luncheon came, one of us had to remain on duty—but indeed we had little appetite, a single tortuous strand of macaroni and an unripe tangerine sufficed us. Then, back again we went to our vigil for the entire afternoon. About five o'clock, when the sun rolled on the edge of the sea once more, facing our cliff, so that every weed in the rock, itself sparkling, every large pink lily springing from it, and every orange among its cluster of glossy leaves on the trees bordering the terrace, showed, vivid and unreal as the fruit and blossoms in Pre-Raphaelite paintings, and the very road seemed magnified by the rays, and near enough for us to touch it, at last, then, a motor—or to be more precise visually, a high column of dust, could be seen whirling on the road in and out above the coast, towards the hotel. At the gate far below it became stationary and began to subside, and out of it stepped a well-known figure in a grey suit, crowned with a grey wide-awake hat, and carrying a grey umbrella lined with green against the sun's rays, which made his red beard all the redder. Snatching from Robins, who followed him, the celebrated lifebuoy air-cushion, which was one of his properties, in case he should be tired during the climb and be in consequence obliged to sit awhile on the rock, he looked up at the hotel and saw us wildly waving our handkerchiefs. He pointed and said something to Robins. It was too far for us to distinguish very clearly the conflicting emotions passing over his countenance, but Robins told us afterwards what his words had been. Feeling his pulse, he had said, ‘Do you see them, Robins? . . . They might have given *me* a heart-attack! ’ . . . The visit, of a week’s duration as we had foreseen, passed off quite satisfactorily. He seemed pleased to hear of the *Rover* again, and opined that its owner must be a most interesting man. My father then explained that he could not spend less than a week here—very likely it would take him longer—since he was obliged to motor forty miles every day, in order to examine the foundations of a villa in which Petrarch had been asked to stay (before going to Montegufoni), but had declined, probably owing, it was suspected, to a feeling that he would not be able to write while stopping there—a sensation with which we were able to sympathise. (It seemed to us a pity that Petrarch had lived at too early a period to have been able to avail himself of the services of the *Rover*!) It was necessary to my father’s work, apparently, for him to measure the foundations; so, during the seven days, he was away a good deal. But even thus we could get no writing done, and one more week was added to the countless others wasted in more or less identical fashion.

A later episode, connected with the same place and arising out of like circumstances, can be classified in a different, more frightening category: for a moment farce assumed a more imposing mantle. . . . One autumn my brother and I were just again leaving England for a long secret session of work at Amalfi, when, the very evening before our departure, my father remarked casually:

'Your mother and I thought of running over to Amalfi for the winter, and staying at the Hotel Cappuccini. She would be quite happy all day on the terrace.'

(In parenthesis, just as no one of my father's generation ever died, but 'passed away,' so he never took a train, but always 'ran over' or 'ran down' . . . 'I ran down to London last week.') In this emergency the good ship *Rover* could be of little use. As so often before, I was obliged to improvise. Since, as I have pointed out, the essence of our opposing systems of strategy was that my father planned every move for months, or even years, ahead, it was impossible to defeat him along those lines: instead I must depend on the element of surprise, backed by inspiration, power of fantasy, élan and the feeling of the moment. Now, therefore, I summoned a landslide to my aid—and it responded!

'Oh, haven't you heard?' I asked. 'There's been a very bad landslide at Amalfi; and several parts of the terrace have been carried away. It was in the *Daily Mail* only a few days ago. . . . I thought you would be sure to see it.'

This news checked my father's plans. It rendered Amalfi, he said, quite impossible for a stay for him and my mother, as they must be able to take a walk on the level, without the necessity of always having to climb the steps to and from the town. But Sacheverell and I were not so sure they might not change their minds again, and decided it would be wiser to alter our own arrangements, and go elsewhere. And when, in a week's time, we reached our new refuge, in Sicily, the first local newspaper we saw informed its readers, in terms of magniloquent sorrow, that a grave landslide had just occurred at Amalfi, and that two portions of the famous terrace of the Hotel Cappuccini had been destroyed. . . . Henceforth I avoided making an excuse of that sort.

(These extracts are taken from the forthcoming volume of Sir Osbert Sitwell's autobiography, *Laughter in the Next Room*, to be published by Messrs.

Macmillan)

A Breath of Air

BY MICHAEL JAFFÉ

WITH each minute of the sun's rise the bar of shadow crept back along the green bank at right angles to the river. As the shadow retreated, members of the mallard colony in its path woke by ones and twos to the warmth of the day ; duck after duck slipped her sleepy head from under her wing, quacked without any outrageous enthusiasm, and slipped into the decorously flowing river. The splash, as each plump body became water-borne, and the greedy smacking of bills, as minute and delicious things were sucked from the slimy green weeds, were noises which drew attention to, but did not break, the calm of the morning.

Miranda watched this ritual of early summer with the unruffled eye of some princess who on the balcony of her apartments takes the customary salute of her household troops to the new day and to her person. Seven months of lying in bed, a long winter's illness, had given her the mixture of languor and alertness that distinguishes the practised invalid. For three May days now, her bed had been drawn close to the window ; this morning was the fourth that she, immobile and propped with pillows, had lain and watched these tame wild ducks at their rising, watched them take to the water and disappear downstream towards the colleges. Miranda was twenty-nine, the wife of Charles Ranken, a classical don at his old College ; though ten years her senior, he was by academic standards still a young man. The slimy green weed was one of the famous features of the University river which ran beneath the bow of her bedroom window ; and the ducks, by habit and adoption, were University ducks. Nothing of Ibsen here, she thought, as the duck squadron in échelon, without a gap in the line, passed from her view ; and her eye followed her mind, which had already strayed to her bookshelves. Nothing distracted her in her meditation, unless it was occasionally to strain after some human sound in this house where there was a conspiracy to walk on tiptoe, so that she should not be disturbed.

Amongst the titles on her books there was none whose author was C. Ranken, not even a school-edition of Cicero. Charles's college was not one which elected its fellows by competitive dissertation ; a small college, with a dozen members of the High Table, can ill afford to prospect for brilliant men, who might over a period

of fifty years prove themselves to be disturbing or disagreeable dining neighbours. Charles had come up to the University twenty years before as a scholar ; he had got a First in Classics and Half Blues for Lawn Tennis and Squash ; his own was the fifth generation of his family at the College ; such a man was not to be overlooked as an addition to an overworked teaching staff.

Amongst the titles on her books, none for the moment took her fancy. When the paralysing illness first took hold of her, she had had all her books moved to her bedroom. They overflowed her shelves ; they were stacked anywhere and everywhere, more books even than Charles had in his rooms in College. They had been carried up from the library and down from the nursery ; out of trunks in the attic they had been brought to her, and set where she could survey her hoard from her bed. To her old home in Northumberland she had sent for all the books she had left behind when she had said good-bye as a young bride ten years ago. The collection was motley : there were Ibsen and Cicero, and *Hints to a Young Rider* and *The Boston Cookery Book* ; there were *Dusty Answer* and *Black Beauty* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* ; *Swallows and Amazons* was imprisoned between the poems of Rilke and the *Centuries of Meditation* ; and *The Apples of England* and *The Little Flowers of S. Francis* stood propped on either side of her looking-glass where David, her eight-year-old son, had put them.

At last her eye lighted on what she wanted, a book on Wintersports given her by her father on her thirteenth birthday, after she had announced that she would spend her honeymoon ski-ing. The real honeymoon had been two months of the Long Vac. spent, not in Austria or Norway or Switzerland, but in the South of France. They had lain in the sun, gamed in the Rooms, and played tennis. She had finished in the last sixteen in Junior Wimbledon two summers before their marriage, so she could give Charles a good, fast game. Yet she had joined wholeheartedly in his pleasure when the von Ecksteins arrived from Bavaria, and they could vary their singles or watch tennis better than their own. She stretched out a hand to ring the bell, and saw with distaste how wasted and unfeminine her arm was become.

The expected knock came in answer to her ringing.

'Come in, Nurse . . . Oh, it's you, Nanny. Sorry to have brought you down. Is Nurse out ?'

'She's washing her hair, madam. What can I get you ?'

'I just wanted a book . . . that fat green one lying on the chimney-piece.'

'This one underneath the photograph of Mr. Ranken ?'

'That's the one, thanks, Nan. How is David this morning? Has he been out yet?'

'Not yet, madam. We're going out after lunch.'

'Don't forget to bring him in after his walk, will you?'

'Master David wouldn't let me forget. I really think he'd like to spend his day here, talking away on the end of your bed.'

'He's my best doctor, Nanny.'

When Nanny had gone back to the nursery, Miranda turned the pages of her book with a mounting excitement until she came to the photograph of a young woman poised at the top of the ski-slope, about to take off for the run. There she stood, with her knees flexed and her arms thrust forward and out; the youth and fullness of her figure were revealed in outline by the cut of her ski-suit; the cut of her jaw showed her confident to deal with powdery snow, over-eager ski-instructors, and the mild boredoms of home life in, perhaps, Northumberland. She was labelled simply, 'Advanced Student at Arosa, ready for the Take-off.' For months now Miranda had lost all feeling in her legs; she could as easily imagine herself wearing skis, alone on a Swiss mountain, as imagine herself walking downstairs, with the help of Charles and Nanny, and out into her own garden to sit on the lawn; that she had been able to do seven months ago, and again, to her joyous surprise, for three days in March.

Because of the ski-cap, Miranda could not tell whether this lady of the snows had hair of a finer gold than her own. But having considered all other points, she let the heavy book slip a little from her grasp. The two-dimensional appeal of the Advanced Student at Arosa faded; she was an unworthy rival. Miranda's mood slid over the snows of yesteryear into a heavy drowsy disgust. The book dropped to the floor as she fell asleep to the hum of the lawnmower.

She awoke to the crackling of a starched bosom, and to the smell of newly-washed hair.

'I've brought you your lunch, Mrs. Ranken, some fish. I looked in an hour ago, but you were fast asleep. How do you feel for the rest?'

It would really take too long to tell Nurse Timson how she felt after her rest.

'Much better, Nurse, thank you,' was what Miranda said.

'You haven't forgotten that Dr. Wright is coming to see you at half-past two. We must just see that everything is ready for him.' So Nurse Timson busied herself with her paraphernalia of needles and syringes in front of the dressing-table. Miranda revoked her

decision not to comment on the aggressive cleanliness of the woman's appearance. Seven years out of hospital, Nurse Timson still remembered what Matrons demanded and G.P.s hardly noticed.

'How smart you look, Nurse. Your hair does look nice.'

'Thank you, Mrs. Ranken, but I wish I had beautiful hair like yours. If mine were so golden and fine, I'd for everlasting be looking at myself in the mirror.'

Miranda smiled. As she allowed the friendly warmth to be bashed out of her pillows into new cold shapes, she smiled at the success of her compliment. She must brush her bright hair again after her luncheon. She must never let that get ill or dead like the rest of her. She began to eat her fish and fruit contentedly.

When she had finished eating, she rang for Nurse Timson to clear away the tray and to bring her the hairbrush. But when she was handed it, she took hold of it as if it were too heavy for her. Nurse Timson was all attention.

'Shall I brush your hair for you, Mrs. Ranken?'

'Do please, Nurse. That would be kind.'

She surprised herself by her complaisance. Brushing her hair she had always been able to do for herself. However, Nurse Timson had unexpectedly good hands; and the two women, who had found the months of this creeping, paralysing illness mutually jarring, found the brushing soothing to them both.

'Someone will do it for me like this when I'm dead.'

'Really, Mrs. Ranken, you must not talk like that. Dr. Wright says . . .'

There was a gentle knock on the bedroom door, which startled Nurse Timson from the rhythm of her brush strokes.

'My goodness me, he's here. Look at the time now. I really didn't expect . . .'

Nurse Timson panicked as she tore the brush from Miranda's hair and put it back on the dressing-table. Then, as the door opened,

'Oh, it's you, Mr. Ranken. We were just expecting . . .'

'Have you finished with Mrs. Ranken here, Nurse?'

'Nurse has just been brushing my hair, Charles. We had just finished, hadn't we, Nurse?'

Nurse Timson pouted her way out past Charles as he stood in the doorway; he was tall and absurdly young-looking and handsome.

'Charles, come on in and shut the door.'

He moved splendidly. So, she remembered, had Otto von Eckstein.

'Miranda, darling, how are you feeling? Nurse looked a bit worried. You've not been bad again, have you, darling?'

'No, I'm fine. I've been asleep half the morning. We were waiting for Dr. Wright to call with the final results of last week's test. But I didn't know that you were free after luncheon today.'

'Redfern . . . you know Redfern, Miranda, he telephoned to say that he couldn't play tennis this afternoon.'

'What a shame,' she said; and the mountain air of Switzerland was in her voice.

'I wanted to come and see you. So I was glad.'

'Who is Redfern?'

'Tom Redfern at Jesus. You must know him. He came up here from London about six months ago.'

'I don't think you can have brought him up to see me then.'

'I'm sorry, Miranda.'

'Why didn't you telephone to Cook when you heard from him. You could have come home and had your luncheon here with me.'

'I didn't want to make a bother. I had my luncheon waiting for me in College, and I thought you would be resting.'

He looked so unhappy that she had to give his hand a loyal squeeze.

'Hullo, you've dropped your book. What are you reading?'

She felt like one of his bashful undergraduates as she answered:

'Oh, nothing special. Something Daddy gave me years ago.'

He laughed comfortably as he picked it up. In clearing a space for it amongst the sick-room litter on the bed-table, he let it fall open at her place. The Advanced Student at Arosa made him blush, first with shame, then with anger. Miranda lay there and watched him dully; she had no more strength to struggle with his tantrums. By changing the subject, he felt he might regain control.

'Miranda, I want to talk to you about David. I know that he is quite bright in the head. But why must he make himself so obnoxious to other little boys? He'll never join in anything properly.'

'You mean that he is no good at cricket, and won't pretend that he's keen on it.'

'It's not just games; though that is disappointing enough considering your father . . . not to speak of his own parents'—Charles attempted a smile—"but at parties he invariably gets himself into a corner and stays there. He doesn't seem to enjoy anything, except going for walks with Nanny.'

'Nan just told me this morning how much he enjoys coming

in here and talking to me about his day, and I look forward to his coming ; it does me more good than anything. It can't be helped if he is brighter than other boys and they don't interest him.'

' Well, I'm glad. I was afraid that you were letting him stay too long and bore you.'

' Oh, no, he doesn't ever. Besides, Nan is in league with those splendid healers Timson and Wright ; she marches him off firmly before I have a chance to get tired.'

' When Redfern telephoned about the tennis, he asked if David would come with them next week for a fortnight on the Broads. Their boy Julian has been ill at home this term ; and they want to give him a proper holiday before he goes back to school. It does seem to be an incredibly kind offer. What do you think ? '

For a moment she gave no answer. She seemed to Charles to be waiting to hear something more. Then she spoke.

' If David would like to go . . . I will talk to him about it this afternoon.'

There was a knock on the door. Charles did not even turn towards it. He went on staring helplessly at Miranda, conscious not for the first time of failure to approach her in her irresponsibility.

' That must be Dr. Wright. Let him in, will you, Charles.'

Miranda spoke with irritation. Even after ten years of being a don's wife, she could not reconcile herself to the academic convention which disregarded the front-door because it was left unlocked.

' Ah, Ranken, I'm glad to find you here. I will come down to your study and have a word with you in about ten minutes. All right ? '

' All right,' said Charles, and went.

Miranda smiled a little ruefully as her husband left her to the mercilessly consolatory, but at the same time rather uppish manner of Dr. Wright.

' So sorry to be late, Mrs. Ranken. I know what hell unpunctuality can be when you have to lie in bed. I will ring for Nurse Timson, if I may, and we'll get on with the examination as quickly as possible.'

' I'm afraid that she did not hear you come in.'

Her remark was lost on Dr. Wright.

' What was the result of the tests you did with Kremsdorf last week ? '

' We're not quite satisfied. We will have to try again next month, I am afraid. It is a very tricky business, as I warned you.'

Your results seem to compare favourably with cases Kremsdorf knew in Vienna.'

'Were those before or after he had worked out his radio treatment ?'

'Those actual ones were before ; but that doesn't make as much difference to his view as you might suppose. Now, if you will just let me lie you right down flat for a moment . . . Quite still, while I do this.'

Miranda was not disarmed ; however, the door opened and they were no longer alone. In the presence of Nurse Timson, Miranda abandoned her attempt to discover whether the fat little refugee from Vienna thought she had a chance to live. If only she could last a few more years, she might see David really begin to . . . he was precocious enough . . .

To retain her nervous strength and will she had to pay the rapacious paralysis at compound interest. Her uncovenanted interview with Charles had exhausted her ; and before the end of Dr. Wright's examination, she was fast asleep. Ten minutes had long gone past before he had finished. Nurse Timson looked professionally grave at his expression. The paralysis had crept further up since his visit of three days before. If it advanced at its present rate, within the week she would be unable to digest food. Or it might attack some fresh part of her body, her lungs or her heart. She might suffer frightful pain, or it could all be over very quickly indeed. It was clear that her legs and those parts of her back which had been lost and won, and lost again, could not be helped back to movement and life. Nurse Timson had read what there was to be read about the disease long ago in her Medical Dictionary. And, although she could not make out the violet spider-writing of Dr. Kremsdorf's report, she was sure that it could bring no hope of long survival for Mrs. Ranken.

Downstairs in the study, Charles waited for the interview which he dreaded. At the end of half an hour, Dr. Wright came in. He handed Charles first of all the specialist's report. Then, without elaboration, he told him that his examination more than confirmed the result of the tests. There was nothing they could do now to control the disease. The last stages were sometimes rapid. Mrs. Ranken might live for weeks ; she might be dead in a few days. It was possible that the disease would recede slightly before the end. But for someone like Mrs. Ranken death must be more merciful than years of lying upstairs crippled.

Charles let him say it all. For many weeks now he had suffered Miranda's growing remoteness from him. The idea of her death had

become a lonely and detached property in the estate of his feeling. He thanked Wright, and would have let him go ; but he found, quite suddenly, that Miranda's death was not truly domesticated in his being ; his mind had built an intellectual card-house whose foundations were unsure.

'About David, Wright. Do you think that he should be out of the house ? He is exactly the wrong age for all this, a very old eight-year-old. He and his mother, you know . . . if he saw her in pain . . . it would make it worse for her if she knew that he knew . . . he might break up completely.'

'If you can arrange for him to go away for a few weeks, and to be with different people, that would be best for him.'

Dr. Wright left the house at half-past three. Charles sat at his writing-table nearly an hour, staring out of his window across the river to the green bank and the green fields opposite. A noisy puntload of people passed in pursuit of a duck family. When they had gone, another party paddled past, drowning the small sounds of summer with a gramophone record of 'The Skater's Waltz.' Miranda upstairs woke to the tune of the dance ; and, in waking, she was seized with the fear that she had no longer the power of sensation or control in any part of her body. She forced herself upright with such violence that she sank back an instant later overcome with nausea.

If the boating-party had been playing the 'Dead March,' Charles could not have moved. He sat at his writing-table and stared. He sat and stared while the solemn little boy and his Nanny walked across his view along the opposite bank of the river to the bridge. He made no move when they came into the house and walked upstairs. Miranda heard them, though they came up as quietly as funeral mice ; and she worked herself into a more comfortable position to be ready for David's gentle tap on her door.

'Come in, darling !' she called, but her voice must have sounded faintly outside the room. He opened the door very softly ; and his first words were hardly more than whispered, until he was sure that she was not only sitting up but wide awake.

'Can Nanny and I come in ? We've been feeding the ducks. Like this . . .'

He crossed the room, giving his imitation of a duck feeding until his face was within an inch of hers. Then he kissed her.

'Have you, darling ? What did you give them ?'

'Prisoner's food, bread and water. I asked Cook to let me have some bacon-rind, but she said she hadn't got any. The only good duck for her is a dead duck. I asked her how she would

like to live on bread and water like Sir Walter Raleigh had to, and the poor children. I don't believe she'd heard of Raleigh, but I suppose she'd heard about the poor children in her nursery like the rest of us.'

'What did she say to you then ?'

"I'll give you bread sauce, Master David." Any fool knows that you have apple-sauce with ducks. I told her Nanny knew about Raleigh and the Tower, because I told her about them last week, didn't I, Nan ?'

Nanny was relieved of the need to say her lesson by Miranda. Miranda was her kind Providence ; and, like Providence, could not wait.

'I wouldn't be surprised if you got sent up a horrid breakfast tomorrow.'

'She won't dare send up bacon, else I'll know she told a fib about the rind for the ducks. You only have orange juice, don't you ?'

'But you don't want to live like me, do you, David ?'

'I'd like not to have to get up in the mornings, and be able to read all day. I'll never finish *Gulliver's Travels* if I have to go on watching Daddy and Mr. Redfern play tennis.'

'But what about feeding the ducks and going for walks with Nan ?'

'Oh, I could watch them as well from the window. And Nan would much rather learn cricket scores and aeroplanes from Julian Redfern than about Raleigh and Lilliput from me.'

'What about Julian Redfern ? Do you like him ?'

'He's a jolly sight older than me. Takes after his father. Clean as a whistle.'

'Tell me what his father is like.'

'He is always asking me if I plan to be a Double Blue like Daddy. I expect he wishes he had been one. So does Julian. He says it would be a help at his school.'

Bit by bit Miranda pieced together her picture of Mr. Redfern, Mrs. Redfern, Master Redfern and Miss Redfern (safely at Westonbirt), until her Happy Family was complete. David's conversation continued like the stale concoction a pantry-boy makes from the fruit and lees left in the cocktail-glasses upstairs ; stale, but strong, for the raw spirit of the alcohol has been sucked up by the fruit. Miranda did not mind the flavour of Nanny or Mr. Redfern or the cricket captain at Julian Redfern's private-school that had been absorbed into her son's speech. Stale and strong, that was her medicine ; and she took it.

She learnt that David quite liked Julian Redfern's company. Eighteen months' difference in age meant that Julian could tell David of the world of boarding-school and dormitories and mince on Tuesdays. It needed the experience of Julian to teach David the territories of conduct known as 'slackening' and 'cheek' to the private-schoolmasters who so conscientiously beat their bounds. It needed the talent of David to retell to Julian the story of Julian's school life and school companions ; so that these, which had been alarming and boring in their complications, were made heroic and amusing. David could make the older boy laugh, and was enchanted by his own success. Yet Charles was hardly to be blamed, as Miranda blamed him, for having missed this bond between the two boys, when he had complained of David's unsociability. Julian was too mistrustful of David's tongue, and David too outwardly indifferent to Julian's allegiance for this bond between them to make a real friendship. In the presence of either's father, the boys kept their distance. However, when Miranda asked David what he felt about a fortnight's sailing on the Broads with the Redferns, he did not take long to make up his mind that he wanted to go. Miranda watched his little old man's face as he gave his old man's reasons ; he would have all sorts of new things to talk to her about when he saw her again ; he would be company for Julian ; and it would be nice for Nanny to have a holiday while the weather was so fine.

So it was all arranged. Charles was delighted that David wished for a pocket-knife as a holiday present ; and David went off armed to combat too inquisitive approaches by Lilliputians, or jolly reproaches by Mr. Redfern about landlubberly dreamers who never had a blade to cut a bit of string with. Nanny disappeared to her sister's at Bexhill ; and the quiet house by the river, empty now of two pairs of tiptoeing feet, became quieter. Miranda had a friendly letter from Mrs. Redfern after two days : David was looking a lot less peeky ; he had really a good colour, and showed he had the look of his father ; the weather kept gloriously sunny ; and, when the wind had shifted from the initial 'soldier's breeze,' David and Julian had got very excited over tacking. The following day a picture post card of Wroxham arrived from David. There was, to Miranda's surprise, something in it about tacking. Julian had got caught up with the end of the boom as they had gone about, and had fallen in ; Mr. Redfern, after rescuing him, had said nothing ; but everyone had seen that Julian had been slackening at tacking. Love from David. Censorship by the elder Redferns must be virtually non-existent. Miranda felt more like rousing

herself than she had done for nearly three weeks. She rang her bell for Nurse Timson to open her window wider, and to let in the air which was making the grass bend and the water ripple.

'A nice warm breeze will do you good, I expect.'

Nurse Timson was privy to the secret of adopting the patient's ideas. The window needed a jerk to open it beyond the point where it had rested by day for so many weeks. A puff of air lifted the fly of her starched veil, as she gave a downward tug on the sash ; and she smacked at the back of her head. She could spill the breeze, but not kill it. It caught at a loose corner of Miranda's sheet, and shifted the weight of her hair on the pillow. The pages of an open book, too tightly bound to lie flat, were whipped up and flicked one against another in a race to reach the last chapter. Curtains filled and, as their lower edges flew free, lost their wind. Then, with a second corrective jerk, Nurse Timson controlled the blow. Her patient sneezed as the dust of cotton-wool, blankets and books resettled. The disturbance was over. Miranda called for writing-paper and wrote to her son.

At the end of the week a second post card arrived. 'Thank you for your letter. This is the Life, Love from David.'

Dr. Wright called that afternoon, and asked after David. She showed him the post card ; Charles and Nurse Timson had already seen it ; but it was a poor hope that any of them could tell her in what tone of voice it had been written. She felt that she had no longer the strength to sit up and write her reply. If she had to dictate her letter, she would wait a day or so. She lay quite still and looked at the sky. There were no cumulus clouds to watch sailing by, only thin wisps of cirrus very high up and slow to dissolve. She made no protest when Nurse Timson pulled down her blind to protect her eyes from the glare. When Charles came in in the evening, she complained of difficulty in breathing ; and he sent again for Dr. Wright who said correctly that the paralysis had not yet attacked her lungs ; the pain in breathing was the work of her imagination. But Charles stayed and watched by her bedside all night.

She took no food for four days. Then, with a paralysing cramp at her heart, she died. Nanny returned from her holiday in the heat of that July afternoon, to find, as she crossed the bridge, that the blinds were drawn on both sides of the house. She at once set to work to help her tired master get rid of the interloper, Nurse Timson, and her belongings. She, Timson, having been discharged of her professional duties by Dr. Wright, was packed off to London by the morning train. She was not sorry to get back to what she

called base. Charles and Nanny kept on congratulating themselves that no alarming telegram had had to be sent to recall David ; the Redfern party were due to return that afternoon.

Charles had had no proper sleep for five nights ; and he agreed that he had better not drive the car to the station to meet David. Nanny should go ; and he would wait in his study.

' Bring him straight into the study to see me, Nanny, when you get back from the station.'

' How will you tell him, sir ? It will break his poor heart, when he hears. I am afraid to see him upset. He is such a quiet, gentle boy, Master David.'

' I wish I knew, Nanny. A child's heart really does break.'

But they both knew it was useless to discuss the fear that had grown in them for weeks. Like the fatal disease to which it was linked, their fear had crept on ; the habit of paralysis had power to spread beyond its original victim. Only if they were fully alive could they bring David through the immediate crisis in his life.

On the way back to the house, David was sadly unforthcoming. Nanny tried to talk to him about his holiday ; but her ignorance of the technical terms of sailing made him irritated. Before they had reached the bridge, they had fallen into their habitual silence of approach. They were outside the study door, when Nanny said :

' Your father wants to speak to you in there, Master David.'

There was a chair just by the door, in the hall. After David had gone in to his father, Nanny sat down on it and waited ; she had her feeling that she might be needed.

' Come in, David my boy. I am glad to have you back again and looking so well. I hope that you've had a good time.'

Charles rose to greet him. The blinds were up again, and the room was full of sunshine.

' Yes, thank you, Daddy.'

Father and son stood facing each other with expressionless faces.

' And I am glad you remembered to write to your mother.'

David nodded.

' David, you didn't get an answer from Mummy to your last post card, did you ?'

' No, Daddy, you wrote.'

' Mummy couldn't write. Her illness is over, David. It is all over now.'

David stood silent and still.

' The doctors couldn't make her get better. So she had to die. Two days ago, David.'

David stood silent and still.

‘That is why I stopped you from going upstairs to her.’

‘Yes, Daddy.’

‘You can go now, David. Up to the nursery, I should . . .’

David walked out into the hall, without noticing that Nanny was still there. She followed him up to the nursery. She had to be at hand when the storm broke inside him. He never turned round, but walked straight across the nursery floor to the window.

‘Now,’ he said quietly, ‘I can make a noise.’

Marcion

BY STEVEN RUNCIMAN

PHILOSOPHY may flourish in an Age of Reason ; but it is in an Age of Disillusion that religious speculation advances furthest. The Classical world was little troubled by the agonies of the spirit. Only when it reached its material zenith in the great unified dominion of Rome, and yet human misery continued, did hope give way to fear and pure philosophy to the anxious search for religious truth.

The Greek joy in living and the vigorous complacency of the Romans were already fading while the empire of the Caesars was still stable and magnificent. Gibbon called the age of the Antonines the happiest in human history ; and indeed its peace and prosperity compared well with the discord that had raged between the Greek city-states, the Hellenistic monarchies or the dictators of republican Rome. But happiness lay thin on the surface. Beneath, instead of confidence and certitude, there was doubt and foreboding. The world was known to be a wicked place, and spiritual teaching brought little comfort. The Greek soul was entering into the Dark Ages. It was surrounding itself with what Plotinus, talking of the Gnostics, was to call the 'tragedy of terrors,' from which it was desperately trying to escape.

This darkness the early Christian Church both helped to enhance and earnestly sought to dispel. It emphasised the omnipresence of sin ; but it offered a constructive code of morals, a sense of fellowship and a promise of ultimate salvation to all its followers. More than any other religion of the time it appealed to members of every class in the community ; and its essential integrity, its refusal to compromise or to fit itself into the easy polytheism of the Empire, gave it a distinctive vitality that was only outrivalled by that of Judaism. A century after the death of Christ the Christians were not yet a numerous nor a very rich body. But a wise onlooker could foresee that they would grow in strength and would endure.

But the Hellenistic world demanded more of a religion than that it should be a community with an ethical code and a gospel. It demanded a philosophical basis. In the wilds of Asia Minor you might find sects such as the Montanists, that early Salvation

Army, whose evangelical ecstasy attracted even Latins like Tertullian. But where there was Greek blood or Greek traditions an appeal must be made to the mind as well as to the emotions. Saint Paul and Saint John the Divine knew this. Brought up in the atmosphere of Greek philosophy, they had laid the foundations of Christian thought. But there were still questions to be faced if reason was to be contented. And the most far-reaching and the most unanswerable of these questions was: what is evil? why does it exist?

In the second century A.D. there was as yet no precise orthodox doctrine to answer the question. The ordinary Christian would have replied that evil came into the world through the Fall. But why the Fall was permitted, or, to go further back, where the vice originated that caused the downfall of the angels who tempted Man—those were problems for which no solution had been given by the authorities of the main body of the Church. The pace in theology was set by the leaders of particular sects, in particular by the Gnostics. The Gnostics, carrying on a tradition inherited from pre-Christian Egypt, divorced matter from spirit and pronounced the former as having been evil from the moment of its creation; and its creation was attributed to a Demiurge. Man's body was therefore irreparably evil; but his spirit could, through a gnosis, an initiation into higher knowledge, reach up to the spiritual powers. A ladder of *eons*, of semi-divine emanations, helped him on his way. There soon were innumerable fantasies that embroidered Gnostic doctrines. But, while they were too complicated or even too absurd to be accepted by the average Christian believer, and while the more traditional teachers of the Church hesitated over their answers, there was room for a bold and logical statement of Christian philosophy, where the problem of evil would be faced in relation to the universe according to the teaching of Christ. That statement Marcion felt himself qualified to make.

Marcion was born about the end of the first century in the city of Sinope, on the Black Sea. The Greeks of Pontus have a considerable Asiatic strain in their blood, which perhaps accounts for a certain crudeness and even cruelty in their thought; and their effect on Greek history has not always been happy. But Marcion, though rather unsubtle, was a kindly and respectable man. His parents were Christian; his father even rose to be Bishop. Marcion himself did not enter into the priesthood. His enemies later said that his father disowned him for having seduced a virgin. It is possible that some early misdemeanour of which he was ashamed

turned his attention to the problem of sin ; but if so his cogitations took many years to mature. In the meantime he went into business, as a ship-owner ; in which honourable profession he amassed a comfortable fortune. In middle age he retired in order to devote himself to the study of religion. For some time he travelled about Asia Minor, listening to the leading Christian theologians. A tradition, a little careless about dates, told that he disputed with the aged apostle, Saint John, at Ephesus, and he certainly met Saint Polycarp at Smyrna.

About the year A.D. 140 he came to Rome. Rome was the most cosmopolitan city of the world ; and its Christian community included men from every Christian bishopric and of every shade of Christian opinion. The leading figures of the Christian world were gathered there, Orthodox apologists like Artistides and Saint Justin, moralists like Hermas, the brother of Pope Pius I, Gnostics like Cerdon and Valentine, Carpocratians like Tatian and the doctoress Marcellina, Judaeo-Christians like Hegisippus. The presence of so many diverse and distinguished teachers led inevitably to factions and intrigue, made worse by the nervous tension in which the whole community lived, with the prospect of persecution and martyrdom always before it. The Antonine emperors, tolerant as they were, demanded conformity to their laws. Even under Marcus Aurelius more than one Christian met his death for refusing to burn a pinch of incense to the divine memory of the licentious Empress Faustina.

Marcion was anxious to share fully in the life of the Christians of Rome. His first action, therefore, was to present the community with the handsome sum of 200 sesterces, about £1,600. But it seems that he already had a reputation for slightly unorthodox views. He was asked, probably by Pope Hyginus, to provide a statement of his faith, which was accepted as being satisfactory.

The satisfaction of the Church authorities began to fade when Marcion developed and expounded his doctrines. He had pondered deeply over the wickedness and, still more, over the unkindness of the world ; and he had thoroughly studied the Old Testament of the Jews and the gospels and epistles which the Christians were now accepting as their canonical books. He found the teaching of the Old Testament hard to reconcile with the teaching of Christ. It seemed clear to him that Jehovah had nothing to do with the God of the New Dispensation. On the contrary, the two deities were in irreconcilable opposition. So far Marcion was in agreement with the teaching of the Gnostics. He may have been influenced by his conversations with the

Gnostic leader Cerdon, whom he apparently knew. But he had no patience with the fantasies and fairy-stories of the Gnostics, in which it seemed to him that the essential ethical issues were lost. But equally he disliked the conservatism of orthodox Christian opinion, which would not face up to the need of a divorce from the out-of-date morality of the Jews. His teacher was Saint Paul, the Jew converted from Judaism, who made it his task to preach to the Gentiles and to tell of the loving-kindness, the mercy and the forgiveness of God.

The Gnostics had tended to simplify the issue. The God of Jesus was good, they said, therefore Jehovah was bad ; and if Jehovah was bad, so were all the heroes of the Old Testament, Abraham, Moses and all the Prophets. We should, rather, admire the victims of Jehovah, unfortunate martyrs such as Cain or the men of Sodom or the Canaanites. Marcion disliked such crudities. He was learned and he was fair-minded. There was, he saw, a morality in the Old Testament, but it was based on the wrong principles. The antithesis was not between Good and Evil. It was between Mercy and Justice. The created world was governed by a Law, the Law that Moses had attempted to interpret ; but it was a cruel, inexorable law of revenge—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth—a law of action and reaction and of cause and effect. It was a law that had no place in it for charity or for repentance. The Law of Jehovah was the Law of Nature, a Law brutish and harsh, against which Christ had argued and which had driven Him to the Cross.

On this antithesis Marcion built up his cosmology. The world, he said, had been created by Jehovah, the Demiurge, who had fixed it to run according to his rules, and who lived in the heaven immediately above us. But there was another heaven, higher still, where the true God dwelt, whom he named the Kind Stranger. To unkind critics his universe was described as a crude box with two shelves in it. Man lived at the bottom (with Hell in a drawer underneath), Jehovah on the first shelf and the Kind Stranger on the top shelf. But had Marcion known the jargon of today, he would have pictured the Kind Stranger as being in the Fourth Dimension ; for he thought of him as permeating through the created heaven and earth independently of the laws of nature. Man, having been made by the Demiurge in his own image, was no concern of the true God ; but such was God's kindness that He wished to rescue Man from the Demiurge's relentless power. He therefore sent Jesus, who was an aspect of Himself (how, exactly, Marcion envisaged the relationship is not clear), into the world to

achieve Man's salvation. Jesus has nothing to do with the Messiah of the Jews. Marcion's Syrian disciples were careful to call him Isu, derived from the Greek *Iesous*, and not, as the other Syrian Christians called him, *Isho'*, which is the Syriac form of Joshua. Marcion's Christology was purely docetist. Jesus did not take flesh. He was in no way born of Mary. He appeared fully adult at Capernaum in the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar and at once began to teach a doctrine utterly opposed to the law of the Demiurge and his flock. His teaching cut across the rules of nature ; and therefore He was hounded to death. Though He had not been made Man and there was nothing material about Him, yet by His death He was able to redeem those that believed in Him. (Marcion's logic here was vulnerable.) He descended into Hell and offered release to the souls of the dead. But the heroes of the old Testament did not understand Him. They had obeyed the law of the Demiurge and were caught up and imprisoned in it for ever. It was only some of the sinners that believed in Him, whose souls He was therefore able to take with Him to merge into the world beyond matter.

On His return to His heaven, His disciples should have carried on His work ; but the original Apostles were too deeply imbued with their inherited Jewish traditions to understand it. Only Saint Paul had a proper comprehension ; and later Christians even misunderstood Saint Paul. Marcion saw himself as the next true teacher in the true Christian tradition.

The Church's failure to grasp the Christian message was illustrated by the books that it accepted as Holy Writ. Marcion naturally had no use for the Old Testament, the scripture dedicated to the Demiurge. But he also rejected much of our present New Testament. Some books were valueless because they had been written by Jews who never understood Christ's message. The Gospels of Saint Matthew, Saint Mark and Saint John belonged to this category ; and they were joined on the rubbish-heap by the Pastoral Epistles and the Epistle to the Hebrews. All that he retained was the Gospel of Saint Luke and ten epistles of Saint Paul, with perhaps a portion of the Acts of the Apostles, and even these were shorn of the passages of which he disapproved. The account of Jesus's early life was removed, together with his genealogy. Miracles that suggested a sympathy with Matter disappeared ; and nothing was permitted that did not fit with a strictly Docetist doctrine. With a self-confidence that modern critics well may envy, he dismissed such passages as later interpolations. His amended Gospel and his *Apostolicon* represented, so he

believed, the authentic words of Saint Luke and of Saint Paul ; and Saint Luke and Saint Paul were the only early Christian writers to understand the Christian revelation. To his Gospel and his *Apostolicon* Marcion added a third work, the *Antitheses* ; in which he compared passages from the Old Testament with passages from his Gospel and the Epistles, to show how profoundly different were the doctrines that they preached, contrasting the Law of the one with the Mercy of the other, Nature with Grace, Justice with Goodness. These three works formed the Marcionite canon. They were to be studied deeply, and to be taken quite literally. Marcion had no liking for the allegorical and symbolical interpretations with which theologians such as Origen were to float over the more awkward passages in their Holy Writ. Anything that was not capable of a literal interpretation consonant with his views was, he considered, to be discarded at once as the work of the Demiurge.

These holy scriptures should suffice to teach the believer how he should live. But, as it is sometimes difficult to interpret a theological doctrine in the terms of daily behaviour, Marcion gave careful instructions to be followed by his Church. As matter was the domain of the Demiurge, the Christian must seek to escape from it. That is to say, he must live a life of the strictest austerity. He must free himself from all the lusts of the flesh. He must abandon his worldly pleasures. He must reduce his diet to the minimum and must entirely abstain from many articles of food. Above all there must be perfect continence and celibacy. Sexual activity was bad in itself in that it was based upon material desires ; but far worse was the probability that it would lead to the procreation of children, that is to say, of further victims to the cruel law of the Demiurge. The true believer must lead a grim ascetic life. Marcion himself set the example and called upon his disciples to be 'miserable together and hated together.' They must be content to face the hostility of the world and must be ready courageously and even joyfully to undergo the agony of martyrdom.

But Marcion was a practical man and a kindly man. So bleak an existence was, he knew, beyond the reach of the ordinary man. Moreover the message of Jesus was of mercy and forgiveness ; it was the sinners that He wished above all to save. Marcion only expected a small proportion of his followers to carry out the stern way of life that he enjoined. These ascetics were the full members of his Church ; but their weaker brethren were not to be despised nor rejected. There was no Gnosis, no secret rites. The practices of the Church were open to all ; and salvation lay within the grasp

of everyone that believed in Jesus. After his baptism (probably a symbolical ceremony in which water took no part), which meant his admission into the Church, he should live according to the Master's rules of continence and austerity. But he could postpone his baptism till the last days of his life. So long as his faith was strong and his repentance sincere, he could by an ultimate gesture of renunciation escape from the world of matter on his death. But those that lived according to the rules of this world to the end would never leave this world. Their every action would be paid for by a just retribution. From the material world of living they would pass into a material Hell.

It is easy to criticise Marcion's teaching. But before we do so, we must remember, first, that our only accounts of it come from his opponents and, secondly, that Christian doctrine was still very fluid and Christian canons unfixed. If any Marcionite literature had survived, we might now be able to understand points on which his teaching seems obscure and even illogical. But it is only from his critics that we can form any idea—necessarily incomplete—even of the contents of his Gospel and Apostolicon. On the other hand, these critics were not unfair to him, for the very reason that Christianity was still fluid. Later on, when Orthodox beliefs were defined and had the backing of the Christian State, the heresy-hunters had merely to show that their opponents' views and practices were incorrect by accepted standards and were a danger to the unity of the State in order to secure their rejection by the authorities and probably their proscription. But in those early days the Fathers of the Church had to rely upon honest argument to prove that their opponents were mistaken. When Tertullian or Irenaeus writes against Marcion he cannot appeal to any established authority ; he can only attempt to show that Marcion's teaching is inconsistent with the teaching of Christ, and to convince the Christian public that he is right. He cannot afford to suppress Marcion's arguments. He must try to understand and then to refute them. At the same time, the unformed condition of Christian doctrine meant that Marcion was not nearly as revolutionary as he now appears to have been. Such practices as deathbed baptisms were in no way unusual. The Gnostics were very numerous. There was a real possibility that they might capture the majority in the Church. The notion that the world was created by the Demiurge was very widely accepted ; and though Marcion's interpretation of the doctrine was bold and new, he was not so much destroying already established notions as elucidating a subject on which there was no agreed opinion.

Nevertheless the leading Christian thinkers of the time firmly condemned his work. In July 144 he was summoned by Pope Anicetus before the Presbytery of Rome ; and after a dispute on matters of theology he was asked to leave the Christian community ; whose authorities, to show him that their action was completely disinterested, returned to him intact the sum of money that he had given to them. They kept, however, his declaration of faith, as a proof of the extent to which he had strayed from orthodoxy. The arguments that orthodox theologians used against him were not all equally convincing. It was illogical to quote against him evidence drawn from Old Testament stories in which he did not believe or which he considered to be the work of the Demiurge. But there were places where his logic was open to attack. It is difficult to reconcile the doctrine of the Redemption, in which he certainly believed, with a Docetist view of Christ such as he held. Again, for all his insistence on the mercy of God, while Christ's descent into Hell resulted in the salvation of the sinners of the pre-Christian era, afterwards it was only the small spiritual aristocracy that had been baptised and followed strictest asceticism which could hope to be saved. That is to say, on a quantitative basis the Kind Stranger's visit to earth might prove to be the reverse of beneficial. Or again, in spite of his wholesale rejection of passages in the New Testament that did not suit him, it was not always easy to make a clear cut. John the Baptist, for instance, was an awkward figure ; for Marcion on the one hand regarded him as one of the false prophets of Jehovah but on the other accepted his recognition of Christ. Marcion's opponents were not slow in pointing out such inconsistencies. They also criticised the irresponsibility with which he jettisoned the whole of the Old Testament and half of the New, and showed that he did not even have authority for his interpretation of the parts of the Gospel that he retained. How, for instance, asks the Syrian Saint Ephraim, could Marcion be so certain that the Voice that spoke from above at the Transfiguration came from the heaven of the Kind Stranger and not from the intermediate heaven of the Demiurge ?

Marcion certainly was not moved by the many arguments derived from passages of Holy Writ which he anyhow did not accept. But it is probable that theological and even logical arguments, however damaging, left him equally indifferent. His aim was not to create a fool-proof theory of cosmology nor a detailed philosophical system. Nor was the average Christian worshipper able to follow the niceties put forward by the Orthodox. Marcion was only interested in propagating a religion based on the sense of God's

mercy and forgiveness ; and his challenging antithesis of Christ against Jehovah, however much it might be lacking in finesse, appealed to minds weary on the one side of intricate dialectic and on the other side unsatisfied by mere evangelism. In spite of his ejection by the Presbytery of Rome, and in spite of the denunciation of the orthodox Fathers, Marcion was followed into the wilderness by a large number of the Christians of Rome ; and their missionaries soon made converts in Africa, in Asia Minor and in Syria, and even as far west as Gaul. Marcion had not wished to secede from the Church ; and he never realised the bitterness with which he was regarded by the Orthodox. One day, as late as ten years after his break with the Presbytery, he met Saint Polycarp, who was paying a visit to Rome, and went up to ask him, did he not recognise him ? and he was surprised and hurt when the aged Bishop of Smyrna, a fierce uncompromising man, brusquely recognised him as 'the eldest son of Satan.' But, from the point of view of Orthodoxy, Saint Polycarp was justified ; for Marcion represented a disruptive force more dangerous than any that had hitherto been known. He not only provided a creed that attracted many Christians, but, being a good business-man, when he was driven out of the Orthodox community, he organised his followers into a Church. Other heresiarchs like the Gnostic leaders had had their followers ; and many of them had been obliged to leave the Church. But their small dissentient groups had been more like philosophical schools gathered round the person of the master ; they were not widespread throughout Christendom. Marcion's movement went further ; it was the first of the great heretic Churches.

Little is known about the actual organisation of the Marcionite Church. As we have seen, it was divided between the ordinary believers, who were not yet baptised and who in the meantime could indulge in the usual habits of life, and the spiritual aristocracy of the baptised, whose lives were passed in the most severe asceticism, in complete celibacy and in as much fasting as was compatible with existence. There were bishops and elders, drawn from this aristocracy, to provide some sort of government for the Church ; but there was apparently no elaborate hierarchy, nor had Marcion himself, though he remained the Supreme Teacher, any constitutional authority over his followers. Nevertheless the organisation was sufficient to enable the Marcionites to continue as a coherent body. Though the ordinary believer in the Marcionite Church was unbaptised, his status was higher than that of the ordinary orthodox Christian of the time. It was his business to see that the baptised, the Elect of the Church, were able to lead

their lives of asceticism. That is to say, as the Elect had to avoid as far as possible even the touch of matter, it was for the ordinary believer—the catechumen—to prepare his food and to see to his bodily needs. Thus, though he lived in a state of sin and would probably never himself achieve salvation, yet he might by a timely baptism still be saved, and in the meantime he could feel himself to be playing an essential part in the life of the Church by his services to the Elect. He could, moreover, attend the Eucharist without communicating, as a sign that he was a member, if not a full member of the Church.

After Marcion's death, which occurred about the year 160, his doctrines were somewhat modified. Apelles, the greatest of his disciples, attempted to do away with some of its inconsistencies. Apelles was, it seems, an Alexandrian. He had lived at Rome with the Master and then had gone to Alexandria, probably to organise the Marcionite Church there. On his return to Rome as a venerable old man of spotless morals, he met a virgin prophetess called Philomena, who in moments of inspiration dictated to him a work that he called *Revelations*. Here Marcion's strict dualism was abandoned. Jehovah, the Demiurge, became a fallen angel, who had been created by God. God thus became the ultimate creator of the universe ; and so it was possible to eliminate Marcion's docetism and to allow the Incarnation and the Redemption, along lines that were theologically less easy to attack. The souls were created by God, Who already endowed each with a sex. The Demiurge merely created bodies and managed to attach a soul to each. Christ's body, though he was not born of any earthly woman, was made up of material elements. He therefore truly suffered on the Cross, and His body ultimately returned to the elements. Otherwise Apelles followed Marcion's system. But the virgin Philomena eventually became rather an embarrassment, as she could not decide whether a divine child with whom she was in communication was Christ or Saint Paul ; while Apelles himself, as he remarked to the orthodox apologist Rhodon, thought that it was best not to try to resolve the more complicated theological problems but to let each Christian believe as he pleased. All that was really needed was faith in Christ and a virtuous life.

The Marcionites seem to have followed this tolerant advice ; for their later thinkers held all manner of doctrines, without endangering the unity of their Church. The names of several are known. There was Mark, who reverted to Marcion's dualism, and Potitus and Basiliscus, who raised the Demiurge to an equality with God. There was Megethius, who added a third God, the God of the

Pagans, and Synerus and Prepon, who followed him and talked of three Principles, good, evil, and just. There was Lucan, who believed in a third element, neither soul nor body, which was, however, capable of resurrection. There was the anonymous author of a book called *Leucius Charinus*, who carried docetism further than ever Marcion had done. There was a school that believed in four principles, good, just, evil, and matter. There was a certain Ambrose, of whose views we know nothing, except that Saint Jerome considered that he had had a bad influence on his friend Origen.

In spite of all these variations the Marcionite Church flourished. It was at the height of its prosperity about the year 200. Both Irenaeus at the end of the second century and Tertullian early in the third were seriously alarmed by its spread. But by the close of the third century it was beginning to decline. Its theology wavered. Its discipline had grown a little lax. A dangerous practice permitted baptism to be repeated, each successive baptism wiping out the sins committed since the last. Such modifications, though they made life easier for the Elect of the Church, lost it prestige ; and many of its adherents passed over to the more elaborate but stricter and more cohesive church founded in the course of the third century by Mani. In Africa and in Syria the Manichaeans soon replaced the Marcionites. The persecutions of Diocletian fell upon the Marcionites as heavily as upon the Orthodox, and perhaps more effectively ; and the triumph of Orthodox Christianity in the fourth century helped to continue their decline. Nevertheless there were still sufficient Marcionites in Cyprus about the year 400 to disquiet Saint John Chrysostom ; and even as late as the tenth century Arab writers tell us that their church lingered on in Syria. When exactly the last Marcionite organisation ended is unknown.

If we are to assess Marcion's importance in the history of Christendom we must make a distinction between his thought and its practical expression in his church. As a thinker Marcion was not perhaps very profound, but he was essentially original. No other thinker brought out so clearly the message of mercy and charity contained in the New Testament, because no other thinker understood that the antithesis to mercy is justice, the rigid demand that crime shall be punished that echoes through the Old Testament. It is a message that entitles Marcion to rank amongst the foremost of Christian teachers. But, though it was on this message that he built his Church, it was too far advanced even for his followers. The traditions of Judaism were already so firmly embedded in

Christianity that they could not be discarded. Even if Jehovah were to be dethroned, the insistence of the Hebrew chroniclers and prophets on Evil had been so effective that it was only by identifying him with Evil that the dethronement could be achieved. After Marcion's death his church, as the fantasies of later Marcionite teachers show, fell back on to the more comfortable and conventional dualism that contrasted Good with Evil, and began to return to the old-established criminal code, in which evangelism—justification by faith—made a poor substitute for mercy. Marcion's special contribution to Christian thought was soon forgotten, except for the aid that it gave to the anti-Judaic forces in Christendom.

It was otherwise with his practical work. Here Marcion was less of an innovator. The asceticism that he preached was in tune with many of the notions of the time. In Syria, in particular, all the Christian communities advocated celibacy and virginity for their holier adherents. The conception of a class of Elect, of an aristocracy that had undergone special baptism or initiation, was well known in the East, whether it was derived from Indian religion or had grown up simultaneously in lands farther west. But Marcion gave it a practical turn. His Elect did not earn their election through elaborate rites, nor did they practise secret ceremonies. They were distinguished only by a symbolic baptism and by the purity of their lives ; and the humbler believers were brought into connection with them by acts of service. The church was simplified and integrated as no Gnostic body hitherto had been, nor even the Orthodox Church itself. Here Marcion's work bore fruit. His secession emphasised the issue and doubtless helped to turn the Orthodox in opposition away from the establishment of a class of Elect, and to make them prefer, rather, to establish a working hierarchy of Church officials ; though the reverence paid in the east to ascetics and hermits, which gave them a power greater than and independent of the official hierarchy, was an outcome from this feeling ; and even the whole development of monasticism, in the west as well as the east, was akin to it. But, as regards organisation, the direct descendant of Marcion's Church was the Church of Mani. Mani's theology shows traces of Marcion's influence, though its Christian elements are more directly derived from the teachings of Bardaisan of Edessa. But the structure of the Manichaeian Church owes everything to Marcion. The Elect and the Hearers of the Manichaeans are exactly equivalent to the Elect and the catechumens of the Marcionites. As with the Marcionites there were bishops among the Elect to run the organisation, and, it seems, a supreme teacher who, like Marcion, had

no constitutional status, but whose authority rested on his eminence as a teacher. We may say, therefore, that it was due to Marcion and his efficiency as a man of affairs that the great Manichaean Church was able to sweep across the civilised world, from Africa to China, and so nearly became the chief religion of its day. To Marcion's organising powers we may also attribute the long success of the dualist heresies of medieval Europe, Bogomils, Patarenes and Cathars ; for their origins lay chiefly in the sect of the Messalians, those fourth-century evangelical dualists who may have carried on Marcion's New Testament and who certainly followed his example in the structure of their Church. Marcion himself would not have welcomed the Messalians as his descendants ; for their Elect were gay folk who believed that they could sin no more and therefore that their misdemeanours no longer ranked as sin. But he would have recognised the grave elders of the Albigois or of the Bogomils as children of the true tradition, though they had blurred their faith by forgetting the essential meaning of Mercy.

Such was Marcion's contribution to history—the basic structure on which the organisation of the churches of the dualist tradition was raised. It was, perhaps, a disruptive contribution, and in the end it came to nothing ; nor would Marcion have thought it a worthy contribution. But the contribution that he would have wished to endure, his contribution to Christian thought, was premature, and still is premature. He felt the force of Christ's charity and kindness. He felt that Christ had not come to combat Evil but, rather, to rescue poor sinners from the doom to which the relentless laws of nature would condemn them, and to teach them the way to escape from the worldly ties that lead inevitably to the cycle of crime and punishment. It was a high doctrine—too high to save this sinful world. For where Evil is present, Mercy cannot afford to quarrel and dispense with Justice ; and to our blind mortal eyes the laws of nature are not even just. For an eye is not always paid for an eye ; and the wicked still flourish like the green bay tree.

Poetry and Truth

An Approach to Goethe

BY J. M. COHEN

ON the eve of his fifty-ninth birthday, in 1808, Goethe decided to write his autobiography. All his works were, in his own words, 'fragments of a great confession,' but the gaps needed filling. It was not till 1830, however, that the whole of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* was finished, the last part being delayed out of consideration for the Countess von Türckheim whom, as the fashionable and frivolous Lili Schönemann, he had loved and almost married. Almost—the autobiography contained more than one beauty on whom he looked nostalgically back, and whom he had almost married.

Dichtung und Wahrheit stopped short with the events of 1775, when the young poet fled from this approaching marriage into high Frankfurt society and took service under the Grand Duke of Weimar. He had been with the same master ever since, managing the affairs of a tiny central German state, visiting the mines, supervising the productions of the state theatre. His house, presided over by his rather coarse ex-mistress, now his wife—who was the mother of his son—was always full of visitors; those whom she invited, of course, for she was insatiable for dancing and parties, and the others who came from all over Germany, from France, from England, from Russia, to call on the great poet, whom they knew best as the author of *Werther*. For in 1774, at the age of twenty-five, he had published a book that had swept Europe and established a new fashion in sentiment, *The Sorrows of young Werther*. It was to explain the origins of that book, and of others, that the autobiography was planned.

The title is paradoxical, but the 'poetry' and the 'truth' are not intended to be contradictory. 'The events of our life have no value for their mere truth,' Goethe explained to Eckermann, 'but only in so far as they are significant.' That was the kind of apothegm that Eckermann loved to manoeuvre the old man into delivering. A penniless youngster, he was officially the Grand Duchess's librarian, but during the last ten years of Goethe's life he devoted himself in the main to noting down the old gentleman's conversations. Too many of his anecdotes reveal Goethe in an

obliging but Polonius-like rôle, yet somewhere beneath the self-important character of the Sage of Weimar was a still living poet, who often kicked over the traces and bucked at Eckermann's carefully prepared conversational approaches.

It was the living poet that was to be revealed in the autobiographies, and that character had been most alive before he came to Weimar. Since then he had revealed himself entirely through his writing ; the formal behaviour of the man of affairs, the centre of his petty court, could only be treated 'in a record of events, which will reveal my activities rather than my life'—his life had gone underground. 'Besides, the most important stage in a man's career is his development, which in my case is generously covered by the volumes of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. Next, there comes a man's conflict with the world, and that is only interesting for its results.' Eckermann collected this aphorism in 1824 ; the last volume was still to come ; but we know that the book, as we have it, was not planned to be any longer. Of course there is *The Italian Journey*, which covers two of the most important and formative of Goethe's later years, but that is, in fact, no more than 'a record of events.' Other autobiographical material is fragmentary ; but for the reader without German *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, and the novel *Werther*, with which it is intimately connected, are the best possible means of introduction to the man. *Faust* and the lyrical poetry are on a far higher level but, in this bicentenary year, it is well to begin wherever it is easiest, to make some re-assessment of one of Europe's very greatest writers.

'Poetry and truth' then, the facts to be ordered and presented by the light of poetry, the genesis of the poetry to be revealed in its context of living experience ; not self-accusation or self-justification, but a revelation of the intimate relations between creation and the external events which prompted it.

The book opens quietly enough with a propitious horoscope : Goethe believed in a personal destiny compelling extraneous events to conform to its dominant pattern. Elderly didactic father, disappointed in his professional career, young mother and sister forming a more intimate and defensive group within the house, a puppet theatre, grandiose building operations, all these pass smoothly across the page, a little dimmed by the mellowing varnish of retrospect. An interpolated story, put into the mouth of the juvenile poet, reminds us that imaginative truth is to take the place of mere formal narration. Friends, relatives, the French occupation, a grand scene between his father and the French commander who is billeted in the magnificently reconstructed Goethe house,

fill up the picture of a wealthy middle-class upbringing, rendered a little less conventional at times by the angular appearances of Goethe senior with his reminiscences of Italy, studiously written in the Italian tongue, his theories on education, sporadically put into practice on his children, and his patronage of local artists.

It is not until we are well into the first part of the autobiography that we are suddenly brought up against an incident which defies the brown, obscuring coat of retrospect, an event which, hardly dimmed by lapse of time, remains an 'oppressive incident' which Goethe was unable to transmute into poetry, according to his general practice. For, as his mother said of him to a sedulous collector of anecdotes about the great man's childhood : ' If one is oppressed by something, one has to work on it ; but when something grieved him he made a poem out of it.'

This incident, however, defied his fifteen-year-old powers of poetic creation, and remained a disturbing memory which had to be worked on throughout an emotional unbalance of ten years' duration. He had fallen in love. The young lady, who appears in the narrative as Gretchen, was two years older than he ; and like the Gretchen of *Faust*, she twice appears sitting in her window at her spinning wheel.

Nach ihm nur schau ich
 Zum Fenster hinaus,
 Nach ihm nur geh ich
 Aus dem Haus.
 Sein hoher Gang,
 Sein' edle Gestalt,
 Sein Mundes Lächeln,
 Sein Augen Gewalt
 Und seiner Rede
 Zauberfuss,
 Sein Händedruck
 Und, ach ! sein Kuss !¹

But the precocious lad did not impress her by his magnificent gait, his noble form, the smile on his lips, the power in his eye or the magic of his words and, unlike the seductive Faust, he received only one kiss—and that on the forehead at their final parting.

He made her acquaintance through some love-letters that he was writing for a friend, and for some weeks spent a great many evenings with her and her companions, on one occasion creeping home unobserved by a side door in the early morning. Already predisposed,

¹ Only for him do I look out of the window, only to follow him do I leave the house. His magnificent gait, his noble form, the smile on his lips, the power in his eye, and the magic flow of his words, the grip of his hand, and, oh, his kiss !

no doubt, by his friend's affair, he speedily imagined himself in love. He was somewhat put out, however, to find that Gretchen had to work for her living, and to trace her to a milliner's shop patronised by his sister. She came of humble people, and the young poet, always acutely conscious of class distinctions, enjoyed a feeling of condescension in rather grandly providing her with the best seats for the Imperial coronation, which he could obtain from relatives in official positions. He carried his patronage, however, a little too far, by rashly recommending an acquaintance of hers to his grandfather for some minor official post. His protégé, unfortunately, was detected in forgery, and Goethe was treated to a series of scenes, which terminated in his physical collapse. What stands out most strongly, however, in the old man's account is the boy's humiliation on learning that Gretchen had testified before the magistrates that she had always treated him as a child, her affection for him being no more than sisterly. His immediate reaction was to transform her in his thoughts into a 'sly and selfish coquette,' to examine her past actions in the light of present suspicions, until he had 'stripped her of all her lovable qualities; but, alas, her image, each time it came before his eyes, gave him the lie.'

We have, of course, no contemporary confirmation of the Gretchen story and, as with most of the episodes in the autobiography, its circumstances were no doubt twisted to suit the old man's poetic purposes. Even her name may be fictitious, borrowed in fact from Faust's victim, a figure who, perhaps, owes something to the poor girl to whom he first offered his affections. But whatever the facts, Goethe was committed thenceforth to a series of abortive love-affairs, which ran to a fixed pattern.

A second vein running through the early chapters of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* is the poet's love of the theatre. First fascinated by his grandmother's puppet stage, he later haunted the French players during the occupation of the town, and grew to know the classical French repertory, himself composing a juvenile play, which was mercilessly criticised by his new professional friends; but by the time of his next love-affair, during his student years at Leipzig, he was able to relieve his wounded feelings, to some extent, in dramatic form. His earliest piece, *The Lover's Caprice*, is a memorial to the publican's daughter Annette Schönkopf.

Even from the autobiographies we can realise the distressing nature of his passion for this girl, who served the meals and dispensed the wine at the students' midday meal in her father's inn. But by now we have an accumulation of contemporary letters

which heighten the colours of the retrospective narrative. One incident, related to Behrisch, an older man in whom he copiously confided, gives us the temperature of the situation. 'This [slighting] behaviour,' he wrote, 'which she kept up the whole evening and continued right through Monday, so discomposed me that by Monday evening I was running a fever, which plagued me all night with alternate hot and cold fits and kept me indoors for the whole of next day.'

The affair ended with Goethe's return to Frankfurt after an attack of blood spitting. He continued to write to the Schönkopf family and to send the young lady presents of clothing and silks; at the same time recuperating from his physical and psychological collapse in the company of his mother's friend, the pious Fraulein von Klettenberg, and making some elementary experiments in chemistry, which mark the beginnings of his scientific interests. The play could help him little, however, for he was still restricted by the faded eighteenth-century convention obtaining in Leipzig, and it was not until his Strassburg visit that he was master of his native lyrical powers.

The Leipzig incident itself is perhaps unimportant in itself. Goethe was a student, and the young lady hardly an eligible bride; but his emotional disturbance, amply evidenced by the letters to Behrisch, shows us that he had already reached the dangerous state of erotic obsession which he later analysed in the writing of *Werther*. The exaggerated fervour of his addresses suggests some doubts of his own powers of conquest, while the need for the admiration and approval of the girl's family and friends gives evidence of a distressing sense of guilt, which recurred with like symptoms in each of his affairs. In reality he never sought marriage, and the purpose of his wooing seems more intimately concerned with the heightened excitability of his own feelings than with evoking any serious response. On several occasions, in fact, the ladies seem to have been selected for their obvious inaccessibility. He pursued them rather to confirm his belief in his own powers than to win himself a wife, and so long as they maintained the fiction of their own coldness or innocence he was content to dance his hectic but formal pavane of protestations. Should they seem on the point of yielding, however, his mood changed sharply to one of 'renunciation,' though the need to put at least a hundred miles between himself and his only too possible bride suggests to us, rather, a compulsive flight.

In the case of Annette Schönkopf, the flight was compelled by serious illness, but in that of his next love, the parson's daughter

of Sesenheim in Alsace, even in his autobiography he is unable to adduce any convincing excuse. In the village she appeared charming, he remarks, but in the streets of Strassburg she seemed too rustic for the fashionable law student ; besides, her health was not good.

Goethe's feelings appear to us in retrospect rather too factitious. 'My dear new friend,' he writes to her after a first meeting. 'I know from a certain inner unrest that I wish to be with you . . . Strassburg never seemed so empty to me before.' One longs to warn the poor girl of the perpetually inflamed state of the poet's feelings ; and then one reads the first of his great poems addressed to her :

Der Abend wiegte schon die Erde
und an den Bergen hing die Nacht,
Schon stand im Nebelkleid die Eiche
wie ein getürmter Riese da,
wo Finsternis aus dem Gestraüche
mit hundert schwarzen Augen sah.¹

German poetry, which had stuttered into existence in the seventeenth century, had now sprung alive, with all the spontaneous virtue of a Shakespearian song. The oak will henceforth stand for ever towering in its cloak of mist, and darkness eternally peer out from the bushes with its hundred dusky eyes. What is the broken heart of the parson's daughter at Sesenheim beside this one poem she engendered ?

The tale of this affair is highly formalised in the autobiography, the parson's family being reduced in numbers to allow of an exact literary parallel with *The Vicar of Wakefield*, a book which Goethe had just read at the time of his visit. But the impact of Strassburg and the literary society there upon the young man still stand out in the brightest of colours. There was Herder—the tutor of a minor princeling—whom he visited morning and evening, with his contempt for Goethe's narrow literary taste, his enthusiasm for Shakespeare and the ballads ; there was the Minster which first roused in him an admiration for Gothic, 'the German style' ; and his tour through Alsace with a visit to the coal-mines and to the alum works which stimulated the poet's lifelong interest in industrial and manufacturing processes. He returned from Strassburg having made just sufficient progress in his legal studies ; he had probably attended more lectures in medicine than in law. But in every

¹ Evening was already rocking the earth to sleep, and night hung on the mountains. Already the oak stood like a towering giant in its cloak of mist, and darkness peered out of the bushes with its hundred dusky eyes.

other respect, his affair with Friederike Brion notwithstanding, he had advanced from adolescence to manhood, and when he came back to Frankfurt, at twenty-four, a man whom the rising literary generation already sought out as a friend, he was a German poet second to none, ready to 'challenge Shakespeare, Homer and all the rest in a play on the story of a noble German,' Goetz von Berlichingen.

He set up as a lawyer, however, to please his father, and he was in Wetzlar practising when he made the acquaintance of J. C. Kestner a year later and fell in love with his new acquaintance's nineteen-year-old fiancée, Charlotte Buff. Kestner himself had contributed to the situation, for well though he realised that Goethe was 'a passionate man, although possessing great self-control,' he was content to think of him as 'most respectful to the female sex,' and to employ him as an escort for Charlotte on the many occasions when his work kept him away.

Imperceptibly, throughout the summer of 1772, Goethe drifted into a condition in which 'he soon could not bear her absence, for she formed for him the connecting link with the everyday world'; and so they became inseparable companions. In September the idyll was brusquely terminated. The trio were spending an evening together, and the conversation turned on the life after death, and the possibilities of meeting in the Beyond. All three were moved, and as Goethe got up to go, he uttered the first overtly passionate words of this strangely muted affair: 'We shall meet again, and among all the figures there we shall recognise one another. I am ready to go, and yet if I were to say forever, I could not bear it. Farewell. We shall meet again.'—'Tomorrow, I expect,' answered Lotte, as he kissed her hand.

That was their final parting. Goethe had already arranged to return to Frankfurt with his Mephistophelian friend Merck, and there he started up a flirtation with yet another young lady. Kestner and Lotte were eventually married.

It is doubtful whether the summer idyll of his love for the mercurial but obtuse Lotte provided more than the germ for *Werther*; the climate in which it ripened was provided by the sudden and shocking suicide of a mere acquaintance, a well-to-do amateur of the arts called Jerusalem. This tragic event, following on an unhappy love-affair with a married woman, seems to have woken the poet into a realisation of the possible consequences of his own turmoils of feeling. 'At this moment,' he wrote in the autobiography, 'the plan of *Werther* was formed, and the whole leapt together from all directions to become a solid mass, as water in a

vessel at freezing point, is converted into firm ice by the merest shake.' He was now sinking into a fresh emotional tangle with a girl of seventeen whose husband shared none of Kestner's complaisance. The news of Jerusalem's death 'shook him out of a dream,' and in four weeks the book was written.

The first part of *Werther* conforms in the minutest respects to the events of the summer visit to Wetzlar; whether the sentiments of his hero are as faithful a reflection of his own I would venture to doubt. True, the final meeting, contrived by the poet with due sense of theatre, and the ambiguity of his parting speech are sufficient evidence that Goethe believed himself deeply in love. His passionate concern, too, with Lotte's silhouette, which he resolved to bury on her wedding-day, and the excitable letters to Kestner that follow his departure, all argue a recrudescence of emotional disturbance; but there is nothing comparable to the total collapse that had hurried him back from Leipzig. Jerusalem's suicide brought him sharply face to face with a weakness in himself, which he shared with many of his new literary friends. It made him once and for all aware of the possible consequences of their cult of the emotions, and there to hand was his material: the Wetzlar summer with all its pastoral beauty, and the ugly death of a promising young member of his own circle. He had only to substitute Jerusalem's suicide for his own precipitate departure to complete an exemplary story for himself and his whole generation. One significant detail in the book gives us a rare flash of insight into the depth of Goethe's self knowledge. The initial cause of the hero's disastrous infatuation is attributed to 'the death of a friend of his youth,' whose riper age 'led her to the grave before him.' The poet had not only an understanding of his malady, but also some inkling of its future cure. For did not his Weimar mistress, Charlotte von Stein, play for him the steadyng rôle that this deceased and shadowy figure had played for his hero? *Werther* represents an 'oppressive' situation, which the poet hardly paused to transmute before expressing as fiction.

Goethe was now, at twenty-five, a famous writer, famous because at the outset of the romantic age he had both expressed its violence and uttered a warning of its dangers. If his brilliant contemporary, Jakob Lenz, 'a shooting star over the literary horizon,' could have taken to heart his sermon against the perils of instability, he might not have burnt out in madness, and Germany would have had another major poet. The remaining books of the autobiography are concerned chiefly with literary plans and achievements, and intellectual contacts. Goethe's first considerable play, *Goetz von*

Berlichingen, is modelled on a Shakespearian chronicle play, and contains only a single situation reflecting his personal sentiments, but he was already planning works on a much greater scale, of which the magnificent *Prometheus* is a chance fragment, expressing in its defiance of the gods his romantic belief in his own 'daimon' and in the economy of its lines a hint of the classical restraint that he was later to achieve.

Hier sitze ich, forme Menschen¹
Nach meinem Bilde,
Ein Geschlecht, das mir gleich sei . . .

A race of men, made after his own image . . . of such perhaps the Egmont of his next great play was the first, but even more deeply rooted in his being were the twin characters who were to accompany him throughout the remainder of his life, Faust and Mephistopheles. Here it is the pastor's daughter of Sesenheim who took the place of Lotte, and the beheading in Frankfurt of a young woman who had murdered her own child that stood for Jerusalem's suicide in the precipitation of the work. The original play is the tragedy of Gretchen : her undoing at the hands of a Faust who embodies Goethe's unconstrained passions for emotion and experience, which Kestner had considered so safely under control. Perhaps in his person the young poet took final revenge for the long rankling snub that he had received from that first Gretchen. But here the initial incidents are so radically transmuted into poetry that such psychological speculation appears trivial.

Goethe's last Frankfurt love-affair, though it brought him the nearest to marriage, is important rather for its results than for its emotional dangers. Confronted with the possibility of a stylish match with the grudging approval of his family and friends, he fled from his own infatuation, first to Switzerland, to look down for the first time on to the long promised Italian plain, and finally to take service under the Grand Duke of Weimar, with whom, even at some cost to his immediate literary achievement, he found the stability and the objectivity that transformed him from an emotional and introspective poet into a 'universal man'; the last perhaps to stand symbolically to his times ; to comprehend the whole of its achievement, poetic, scientific and philosophical ; to stride, in fact, so far in advance of his romantic contemporaries that he could spare hardly more than an impatient glance for their quite considerable poetic creation.

* * *

The true Goethe of the late years, the writer of the autobiographies,

¹ Here I sit and shape men after my image, a race that shall be like me.

is hard to find. For all the plethora of letters, conversations and anecdotes, there is very little that reveals the old man's private thoughts. It is too easy for anyone delving into the pious agglomerations of 'Goethe material' to be taken in by the cult object into which he was transformed by the eager recorders of his every word and gesture. Occasionally, however, he would show that he was not altogether comfortable on his pedestal by falling in love and writing poetry as full of feeling as ever, though more classical in form, or by upsetting one of the sedulous Eckermann's carefully pre-arranged conversations; as when he refused to discuss the subject of immortality and disposed of a minor poet who had written on the subject with a single Johnsonese bludgeon stroke. 'He would have found something more sensible to think about, I promise you,' he remarked scornfully, 'if he had had better luck in life.'

Only a day or two before he had been rejoicing that he had been born in the age he had, and seen the Seven Years war, the American war of Independence, the French Revolution and the Napoleonic epoch. Other people could only learn of these events from books. He had had an eye-witness's experience.

Again, at eighty, rebuked for changing his mind, he turned on the faithful Friedrich von Müller, thirty years his junior, angrily defending his inconsistency. 'I always try to think a new thought every day,' he pronounced, 'to avoid boredom. One must be changing all the time, renewing oneself, rejuvenating, or one stands still.'

He did not think that the clarity and coolness which were characteristic of his later work had cost him any of his earlier warmth, though he judged it more fitting to put the words into Schiller's mouth than to make the claim for himself. One regrets, however, that he did not persist with his fairy tales, but chose a formalised realistic setting for his second great novel, *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, in which he treated an emotional tangle with a rather overloaded scientific detachment. It is hard at first sight to appreciate his statement that 'there was not a line in it that he had not himself experienced.' The novel is almost Jamesian in its treatment of 'a case,' the relations of the four 'elective affinities.' From the point of view of construction it is much in advance of *Werther*. Yet where *Werther* with his 'all for love and the world well lost' carries the novel irresistibly forward, the fatal four are only too clearly manoeuvred into position by their author, reminding us in this of the over intimate quartet in *The Golden Bowl*. Henry James, however, would never have allowed himself the almost ludicrous melodrama of the dénouement, in which

Ottolie inadvertently drops her rival's baby into the pond. Goethe at that point was too detached from everyday life to be altogether successful in this form.

How little the poet was taken in by his elevation to the Sage's throne is clear from a chance anecdote of a Russian visitor, Count Alexander Stroganoff, who arrived in Weimar in 1825 in no mood to offer his homage to the mighty. 'Being of a serious nature,' the count tells us, 'and, I admit, not lacking in natural pride, I always consider it rather humiliating to tender respect to any but our rulers or benefactors.' Calling on the great man in this frame of mind, he was surprised to find himself picked out for especial attention, and somewhat shocked at the company's quite unembarrassed conversation concerning the interpretation of the *Westöstliche Diwan*, the true meaning of *Faust* and the great man's underlying philosophy, all conducted most unashamedly in Goethe's presence. The poet's own opinion of this pretentious nonsense he had the opportunity of learning next morning. For, inviting his independent-minded visitor for a ride in his carriage, the old man took the rare pleasure of unburdening himself. 'I find myself in Voltaire's situation,' he observed, 'trying hardest for the approval of those who withhold their applause. You may say that you are not one of these, but . . . I value the opposition of a man who understands the significance of art for all humanity more than the sickly enthusiasm of our exuberant national poets, who stifle me with words. I must admit to you that you are partially right when you say that Germany has not understood me.' He went on to enquire what Byron's true estimate of his works had been, and fortunately the Count was able to be flattering without hypocrisy.

The last words should be left to the poet himself.

Wer immer strebend sich bemüht
Den können wir erlösen

cries the angel as he bears Faust's body aloft at the conclusion of the poem—it is the man who perpetually struggles whom we are able to redeem. 'There is the key to Faust's salvation,' Goethe stated to Eckermann, 'a higher and purer activity persisting in the man to the end, and eternal love coming to his aid from above.' The working of the poet's mind and feelings never ceased, although in the tedious court of Weimar he must feign immobility; and if it is the younger Goethe whose works we most constantly reread, we can never deny our respect to that ever active arbiter of European taste, the Sage of Weimar.



'C'est un de mes principes,' wrote Flaubert, 'qu'il ne faut pas s'écrire.' It is this vain search for objectivity that has led literature astray for nearly a century. To disappear from one's own book is to vanish up the hempen rope of one's genius, and leave it standing on its end. But this demand for the detached and perfect work of art, with its emphasis on style, presentation and shape, plays havoc with the reputations of the very great, whose works are so many steps in an emotional and spiritual evolution that is significant, because exemplary, for all mankind.'

'My standards,' said Goethe, 'at each stage in my life's development, have been no higher than what I was able to *create* at that stage.' Sometimes, as in those of his lyrics that come closest to folk-song, the poet himself appears to be absent; yet when we know the circumstances of his life at that moment, we can see the personal significance of the poem's apparently autochthonous images. Spontaneous at all times, he will turn an unsuccessful play from tragedy to comedy, write a novel in so many states of mind that the characters remain constant only to their names, and not always to them, and add scenes to his masterpiece *Faust* at such long intervals that it is difficult to think of the work as an integral whole. But never throughout his long life did Goethe stand still; never was he content 'to take delight in that beauty which is already *found* instead of in the *search for new beauty*', without which search 'art becomes,' in the words of P. D. Ouspensky, 'a superfluous æstheticism, encompassing man's vision like a wall.'

Now, at the second bicentenary of his birth, we have once more the opportunity of re-assessing the man who constantly advanced throughout his whole eighty years; the poet who found his language without a literature and left it with a legacy of great poetry; the world figure who found Germany with an obscure and provincial culture, and left her the land of Werther, of Faust, of Wilhelm Meister—and of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

The Working Parliament

BY MAURICE WEBB, M.P.

IN 1945 the electors of Britain chose a new Parliament. Their decision confounded those prophets who, in the belief that the post-war growth of a radical mood in the nation would balance the personal prestige of Mr. Churchill, had forecast a stalemate. It was a remarkable event. But the cause was no great mystery, although some would make it so. The country, which had seen the Conservative Party in authority for the greater part of the period between the wars, decided that it was due for a change. Historians need not waste time probing for more subtle reasons.

Let us, therefore, consider the results rather than the causes of the 1945 decision. What sort of a Parliament has it produced? Now, in answering that question, it is not enough to give a catalogue of events. Nor shall we arrive at the heart of the matter merely by producing some sort of blue print of the working parts of Parliament. After all, it is a British institution, possibly the most British of all our institutions. It is, therefore, beyond logical analysis or dissection. It must be sensed rather than measured, felt rather than weighed. The impressionist, who can see beyond the shape of his material, will provide a more accurate portrait than the photographer. Parliament cannot be taken apart, like a clock, to see how it works. And the 1945 Parliament has been no exception. Indeed, its most striking feature has been the success with which it has maintained tradition and kept alive all those inherent qualities which make the British Parliament unique among legislative assemblies.

The Parliament of the United Kingdom has three elements—the Sovereign, the House of Lords, and the House of Commons. It is usual to speak of Parliament as if it were confined to the House of Commons. But this is wrong. These three elements, each with separate and well-defined powers, collectively form the legislature. Each has a part to play and each must be considered in any study of Parliament.

The place of the Sovereign in the process of government is inevitably obscure. His only public act is the sessional opening of Parliament. The rest of his work is done in the seclusion of the Privy Council or in consultations with his Ministers. It is not easy,

therefore, to form a judgment on the work of the present Sovereign as an integral part of the 1945 Parliament. For such information as can be secured we must fall back on those favoured resorts of the newspapers, 'inner political circles.' There we find, among Ministers, the highest commendation of the constitutional activities of His Majesty. He is scrupulous in adhering to the limitations long imposed on the Crown by our democratic legislature. He has complete respect for his position as a Constitutional Monarch and has never sought to exceed it in even the smallest way. Yet it is known that he follows affairs with the closest interest. Each day, when the House of Commons is sitting, it is the duty of the Government Whip, who holds the Royal Household appointment of Vice-Chamberlain, to send the King a telegram containing a report of what has taken place in the Chamber. We have had Monarchs who never read these telegrams, or, who, if they did, found it difficult to understand them. But the present King regards the reading of his daily telegram as a prime duty. He has even suggested to responsible Ministers that the telegrams were incomplete and not adequate for his purpose. Improvements were made to meet his wishes. This close interest in what is happening in politics is not an affectation. It is part of the King's deep-rooted sense of public duty. He is genuinely concerned about the welfare of his subjects and if reading official papers fails to give him all the information he wants, he will have the responsible person along to the Palace, whether he be Minister or an expert private citizen, to find out and discuss the relevant facts. It is beyond dispute, I think, that the present Monarch has made a large personal contribution, through his integrity, good sense, and intelligent public interest, to the stability of British politics in the difficult years of post-war reconstruction. He has been a formative, not a formal, element, in our system of government in its most acute period of strain.

Now, let us turn to the House of Lords. Although they are not elected, its members are as much 'Members of Parliament' as those of us who carry the title. In the reign of Henry the Eighth they were called 'M.P.s' Since that time much of their authority has gone, but they retain considerable power. How have they emerged from the situation in which the 1945 election placed them? It was a unique situation. The party which held power in the House of Commons with a commanding majority and was responsible for government, found itself in the House of Lords with hardly enough personnel to man all the posts, let alone provide a working majority of votes. In such a situation our system might

well have broken down. But it did not do so. Under the far-seeing leadership of Lord Salisbury, the Conservative Party in the Lords decided it would not openly challenge the Government. This decision meant that the House of Lords, for the most part, avoided a political clash. It got as near a Council of State as any British instrument of government has ever done.

There were differences but a compromise settlement was usually found, the Government being prepared to make concessions in return for the free passage of the main features of its legislative programme. It did not always like the sacrifices it had to make but, on the whole, the Government was satisfied to pay this not exacting price in return for freedom from an open and diverting war with its opponents in the Lords.

This lush and benevolent atmosphere of accommodation has naturally favoured the growth of the best qualities of the Upper House. Its active members are mostly men who have held office in the Commons, retired senior public servants, or men who have achieved eminence on one side or the other of industry. Thus, debates in the Lords have tended to be impartial and expert examinations of facts rather than clashes of principle. It has become a sort of 'polishing' assembly, a place where mature minds have winnowed out the chaff left in the legislative harvest sent up by their colleagues along the corridor. Even the most violent opponents of any form of Second Chamber have admitted that the experience of the past three years has shown the advantages of an institution where second and objective thoughts could be taken.

Yet it is generally admitted that the present House of Lords is a basically imperfect instrument of government. All the political parties agree it is wrong to maintain the heredity basis as the largest factor in the recruitment of its members. It is also agreed it is wrong for any one party to have a permanent majority in the Upper House irrespective of the election decisions of the country. This agreement is the one positive result which emerged from the dispute between the two Houses which followed the Government's decision to restrict the Lords' power of veto to twelve months.

The Government took the step because, it said, it could not be sure that the Lords, with their predominant Conservative majority, would not veto Government Bills in the last two years of the present Parliament, when the administration would be denied the protection of the 1911 Parliament Act. This issue will produce a different atmosphere in the Lords during the remaining stages of the 1945 Parliament. There will not be the neutral air of debate we have had for the past three years and the voice of the partisan will tend

to drown the restrained and soothing contributions of the impartial expert.

If it is complained that the Government has been rash in forcing this change by introducing its bill to restrict the Lords' veto, Ministers will reply that the change from calm objectivity to sharp party clash would have taken place anyhow, since the Conservatives could not have resisted the temptation to exploit the unqualified authority which the existing Parliament Act gives them in the last two years. But whatever the merits of that difference of view, it must be admitted that the House of Lords, as a whole, has done much since 1945 to establish the case for some form of Second Chamber. Some of its debates have achieved rare brilliance and much of the legislation which received the Royal Assent was improved by the scrutiny of the Upper House.

So far, we have considered those elements in Parliament which were not changed in themselves by the 1945 election but merely had to face changed circumstances. Now we look at the third element, the one which was drastically changed, the elected House of Commons. The change here was as sweeping as anything we have had in our political history. There are three aspects of this change to be noted. First, there was the big change in personnel, over 400 of the 640 M.P.s being completely new. Second, there was the change from a Government of the Right to a Government of the Left. And, finally, there was the change from a Coalition to a Party government, the first pure Party government we had had since 1931. In these circumstances, and with the general world situation in a state of unprecedented confusion with the sudden end of the war, it might have been expected that Parliament would take a long time to settle down. The political writers predicted there would be a long period of uncertainty, with the new Parliament 'finding its feet' before it could settle down to its work. They pointed out that the new Opposition was unexercised in the art of opposing and the new Government, outside a few leading men who had served in the Churchill administration, inexperienced in the science of governing.

These expectations seemed reasonable enough at the time, but they were not fulfilled. The most surprising thing about the new assembly was the speed with which it settled down and shook off the crude characteristics of the novice. Both the main parties had a majority of new members who were seeing the place for the first time. Yet these freshmen quickly acquired a lively sense of the 'mystique' of Parliament. It was not simply that they soon picked up the rules, and, for example, learned that the M.P. does

not clap to show approval but gives a sustained and shrill cry of 'Yah, yah, yah, yah' (the Westminster version of 'Hear Hear'). It was more than that. It was the absorption in each member's mood and feeling of the accumulated atmosphere and personality of the place of which he was now part.

I do not know how this happens. But it always does. There is no conscious effort to make the new member accept the inherited character of the House as something inherently good. But with few exceptions he soon does so. No matter how radical he may be, or how inflamed with reforming intentions in the furnace of the election, he quickly senses that this parliamentary instrument has been fashioned by centuries of ripe experience and he becomes almost violently conservative about it. Here again we have a stabilising factor, and 1945 found it as potent as ever. Out of it there grew that feeling which transcends party differences, without obscuring them—the feeling which links all sides in a common effort to preserve the probity of Parliament, to uphold its good name, to maintain the essential liberties of the back-bencher against an ever-encroaching executive, and, above all, to prove that a free, deliberative assembly can work with efficiency.

I stress these points because it is essential to the understanding of the present, or of any other, British House of Commons. It is a gross error to regard the House merely as a forum in which a group of men sit opposite another group of men locked in debate around irreconcilable differences, breaking off at intervals to settle the matter in the division lobbies. In this Parliament it is true that party differences have been as sharp as ever they were. The return to Party government after a long phase of coalition made that inevitable, even if the differences of view had been less acute than in fact they were. But if the party clash was as automatic and complete as many suppose, there would be no point in debate or the expression of opinion. We might as well settle it all in one comprehensive vote at the start, give the Government its marching orders, then go home and amuse ourselves.

In fact, there have been many issues where members on both sides have made common cause against the administration. Ministers, more than once, in estimating their chances of getting their way, have had to reckon with a possible fusion between sections of their supporters and those opposite.

The present Government, powerful as it has been, has been no more able to ignore back-bench opinion than any of its predecessors, or, at least, when it did, it ran into difficulties. This proved notably true in the committee stages of bills, where details are considered.

Here the Government has abandoned or altered a great volume of its original submissions in face of criticism from back-benchers on both sides. It is good that this has been so. A large part of the virtue of Parliament would have died had private members neglected to maintain the final supremacy of their opinions over those of the executive. But, after all, it is in the basic differences of party where the character of this Parliament has been formed. Let us then consider the parties and their work.

The Conservative Party has laboured under unusual handicaps. Opposition is an art in itself and the Conservatives had had no experience of it for nearly the whole of a quarter of a century. Only a few feet divide the two despatch boxes but there is a world of difference between the two situations. The Government has the services of a highly competent civil service to sustain it in its work. The Opposition must fend for itself. And it was a long time before the Conservative Party could adjust itself to this sudden impoverishment. It suffered, too, from the absence of any declared body of doctrine on which to base alternative suggestions to the Government's case. The Conservative Party, hitherto, has never thought it right to tie itself to a set programme. It has affirmed certain general principles but has always convinced the electors that more detailed undertakings would hinder the business of government. Its front-bench spokesmen have therefore had to rely on personal improvisation when called upon to say in what manner they would have proceeded to deal with the situation under their criticism. Not surprisingly, there has been some inconsistency between their various declarations, or, on occasions, the spokesman at the box has found a strange and chilling absence of support from the men behind him.

The difficulties of this phase, however, were covered up by the virtuosity of Mr. Churchill, and, in a lesser way, by the convincing skill of Mr. Eden. In Mr. Churchill, of course, the Opposition have had an immense asset. He is easily our most accomplished parliamentarian and can be relied upon always for an exceptional performance. It must be said, however, that he is not an unmixed blessing. At least, there are many on his own side who shake their heads and wonder whether the price of his unique personality and great prestige is just a little more than they ought to pay. The trouble seems to lie in his unpredictability. They have never been quite sure whether he would be in his place. And if he was, they could never be quite sure what line he would take. Mr. Eden, most loyal of deputies, may, because of his belief in working with colleagues, have carefully worked out a sound and

agreed line of attack for the day's proceedings. But Mr. Churchill unexpectedly turns up and takes over. He rushes them breathlessly and brilliantly up some sudden hill, then leaves them there to extricate themselves while he goes off to other pre-occupations. It is all very exciting but it does not make for sustained and coherent opposition. In the later months, however, with the emergence of Mr. Butler from the Central Office with a set of 'Charters' the Opposition has been more at ease, and much more effective. It has had a doctrine to expound and, although it has not yet completely reconciled the differences between those who want free markets and the price mechanism and those who stand for a degree of state planning, its work has acquired a poise and assurance which was not there in the earlier days of the present Parliament.

The Liberal Party, although barely a fragment of its ancient self, must not be overlooked. For its size it has done well. But differences of view between Right and Left have taken the edge off its attack. There has hardly been an occasion when the Chief Whip has been able to get all his flock into the same Lobby, which makes it difficult for the public to take the Liberal Party seriously. Nor can we pretend that there have been signs in the House of those periodic stirrings of the Liberal spirit outside which are reported to be starting almost every autumn but which, somehow, shrivel and die before winter is far advanced. Indeed, if the work of the Liberal Party in Parliament, hard as its members have striven, were the sole available means of measuring the position of Liberalism in the country, it would be difficult to escape the conclusion that it can never regain its former glory. For, in the House, even its young men are distressingly old. They carry themselves, not with the buoyancy of those who have seen a great light, but with the solemn and weary air of those for whom life has turned irrevocably sour. They are terribly conscious of being a small remnant in a mighty host and it has taken all the sap out of them. Their mood is that of the mourner, not that of the participant, in a revival meeting and they just cannot shake it off. But the Liberal Party has played no significant rôle in the 1945 Parliament. My statement 'for its size it has done well' is as high as praise can properly go.

The Labour Party has had all the advantages which inevitably flow from winning an election. It is stimulating to know you have won. You flex your muscles and throw out your chest in sheer animal enjoyment of the sense of well-being which comes from having overthrown a strong opponent. The big man in a crowd gets a feeling of superiority as he looks down on those about him of lesser physique. And so it was with the vastly bigger Labour

Party which came back from the polls in 1945. The suppliant had become the custodian of the sources of public benefaction. The long-despised minority filled to overflowing the seats of power. It gave the Labour Party zest and assurance. It could face its responsibilities with all the inherent strength of will which comes from electoral success. It cannot be said that this early assuredness has remained. Experience has brought a mellowing of the spirit. Adversity in the form of mounting world and home problems has quenched a little of the early fire, and the Party now is unquestionably in a more sober and restrained mood. But this loss of the 'first fine rapture' has not weakened the Party. On the contrary, by arousing a deeper sense of realism, by compelling a sharper scrutiny of facts, and by forcing members to face the unpalatable, it has given Labour an inner stability and balance.

In many respects this is the most gifted and efficient Labour Party ever to sit at Westminster. For the first time the majority were young, over a hundred of them coming fresh from service in the armed forces. There has also been a much wider diversity of types than ever before. The trade union official, for long the dominant source of recruitment, is now a comparatively rare figure. There has been a big accretion of professional men—lawyers, journalists, teachers and the like. Quite a number of men from the ranks of commerce, some of them even with claims to be considered as 'big business,' have also found their way into this new Parliamentary Labour Party. It represents almost a complete cross-section of British society, providing the party with an unusual balance of approach to its work and making available experienced experts on most subjects.

It has not been easy for all these energetic, young, new M.P.s to settle down to the humdrum life of a Government back-bencher. Opposition is a far more fruitful field for the newcomer. There he is encouraged to raise his voice, but the supporter of the Government must restrain his combative instinct and help the administration to get their measures through with minimum delay.

The leaders of Labour were apprehensive that these conditions would lead to the outbreak of inner revolts and clashes. A man of spirit must find some means of expression, and if he has to leave the assault on the enemy to his front bench he will inevitably tend to start up disputes with his colleague. At least, that has invariably been the case, but to the surprise, and relief, of those in authority in the Labour Party, there has been remarkable freedom from internal strife. Discipline has been relaxed and standing orders governing the actions of back-bench members have been abandoned.

The unity of the Party has been preserved without recourse to the imposition of sanctions by the Whips. Altogether, then, we may assert that the Labour Party has come well out of its first experience of office with undisputed power. It has done so through team work rather than through the personal triumphs of a few unusual men. It has learned much from the harsh experience of post-war problems. It has shed many illusions, and acquired greater maturity of judgment. It is, without doubt, much more fit to govern than it was when it started out in 1945.

Looking now at the House as a whole, the impression one gets is of an assembly which has functioned successfully and maintained its highest traditions. It has done this through an improvement in the general level of ability rather than through the emergence of a few exceptional men. It is notable that few, if any, men have emerged who can be said to compare with the great orators of the past. The day of the spell-binder has gone. Current oratory is restrained, homespun stuff. It has lost in colour but gained in cogency. It may rarely sparkle but it more often illumines.

Mr. Churchill has been unmatched in his ability to say the daring, original thing. His judgment may not have been quite so sure as it was in wartime. He may, as many think, have shown serious flaws in his equipment for peacetime leadership. But he is incomparably the outstanding personality of the House and will remain so. Alongside him on the Opposition Front Bench, Col. Oliver Stanley has been a figure of great distinction, enriching everything he touched, and never stooping to the shoddy or commonplace. Mr. R. A. Butler has assumed the mantle of chief architect of his Party's future and in the process has acquired new stature, whilst Mr. Anthony Eden, although strangely subdued, has with great charm and graciousness become an 'elder statesman' universally respected.

On the Government front bench Mr. Attlee sits in undisputed authority. He is Leader in fact as well as name. His modesty remains and there is no sign of any of the colourful qualities which are said to be indispensable to political leadership. But Mr. Attlee's integrity and common sense have availed to establish his reputation. There have been more glamorous and exciting Prime Ministers, but few more successful. Mr. Herbert Morrison has led the House of Commons with rare judgment and skill. As a master of tactics there is not his equal. No other person could have got through without mishap or breakdown the programme which Mr. Morrison has somehow contrived to complete in each session.

Mr. Ernest Bevin and Sir Stafford Cripps are two other out-

standing personalities on the front bench. The Foreign Secretary has kept most of the country behind him in his untiring efforts to unravel the complex tangle of foreign relations. He will live in history, although his work has borne little of the fruit it deserves. In his rôle as director of the nation's economic reconstruction, Sir Stafford Cripps has shown masterly command of himself and the situation. There is no clearer brain in any Party. If his understanding of the simple humanities of life and his sense of human beings was as profound as his intellect or as complete as his honesty he would, indeed, be the complete, the consummate, statesman.

Does all this sound flattering? Does it suggest that all the occupants of the two Front Benches have been men of exceptional worth? It probably does. But that would be a wrong conclusion. There have been failures—gross failures—on both sides of the Despatch Box. The Government and the Opposition have both carried their burdens—some of them almost too grievous to be borne. On the Government side there is more than one man whose appearance on his feet, clutching a mass of notes, is the signal for the instant departure of even the most faithful of his followers. They know that if they stay they will be either bored beyond endurance, or given that tingling feeling of shame in the spine which comes when one of one's own side is putting his foot in it. And from observation, and from talks, I know that the Opposition back benchers have often gone through the same painful experience when some of their 'giants' have been lumbering around and giving grotesque performances.

My trouble here is, I am unable to specify the names of these gentlemen. As a M.P. I must adhere to the rule which requires me to attack or adversely criticise a colleague in the precincts of the House after having given him notice. I must therefore leave you to speculate on the identity of the incompetents who sit in authority over us.

For the great unknown, the so-called 'lobby fodder,' who support these great men on their respective sides, it has been a time of incessant, exhausting, grinding work, rather than a time in which to make personal reputations or to cultivate those gifts which lead to preferment. If this Parliament is to bear a title in history, it might well be described as the 'Working Parliament.' There has never been anything quite like it. The strain has been unbroken since the openings days and there are signs now that M.P.s have been driven to somewhere near the limits of physical endurance. But it could hardly have been different. Even with a Government pledged to a less radical programme of reform, the post-war situation

would have inevitably compelled Parliament to undertake onerous and exacting duties.

There remains but one feature of Parliament on which I must comment—its standards of dress. Sartorially there has been a sharp decline. The editor of the *Tailor and Cutter*, who watches our public men with a vigilant eye, may write this Parliament off as a total loss. It is possibly the worst dressed House in all history. Making allowances for abnormal conditions, the sombre fact must be faced that this is a House of Commons which knows little of the art of dressing and has cultivated sartorial indiscretion as a mark of distinction. But that is the spirit of the age. And, since it is the business of Parliament, in a democracy, to reflect the spirit of the times, we must account the departure of sartorial glory from the precincts of Westminster as a good and virtuous thing. After all, a 'Working Parliament' should dress itself in working clothes.

SEVILLA

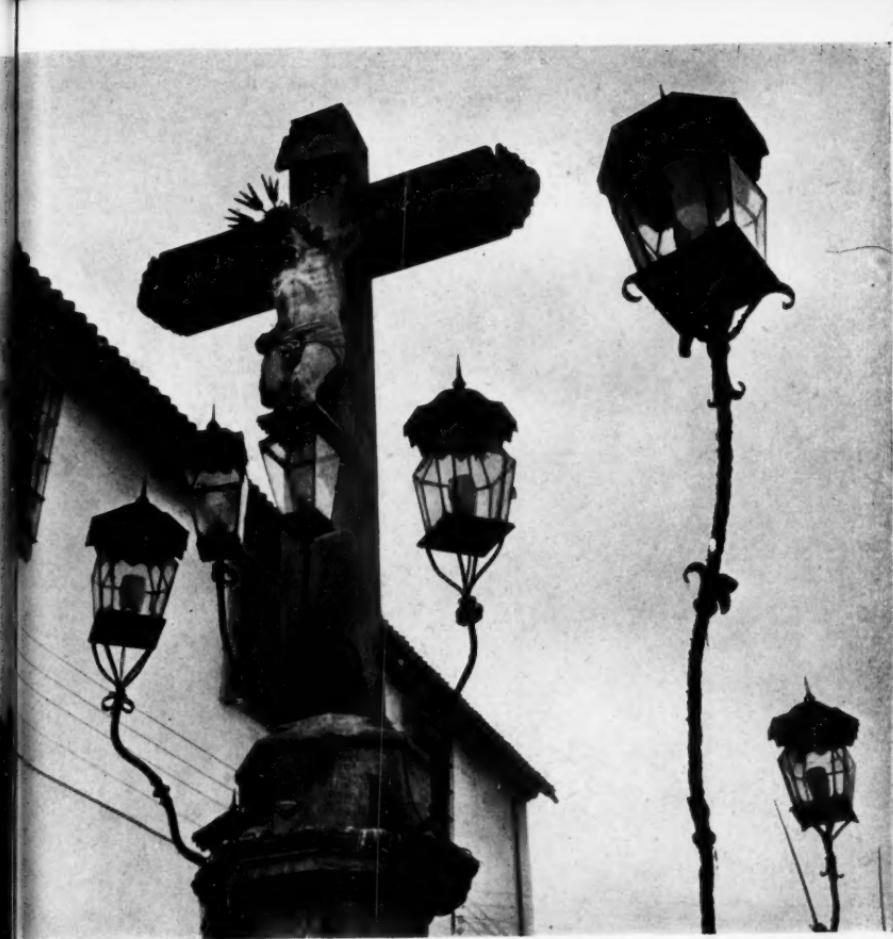


SEVILLE

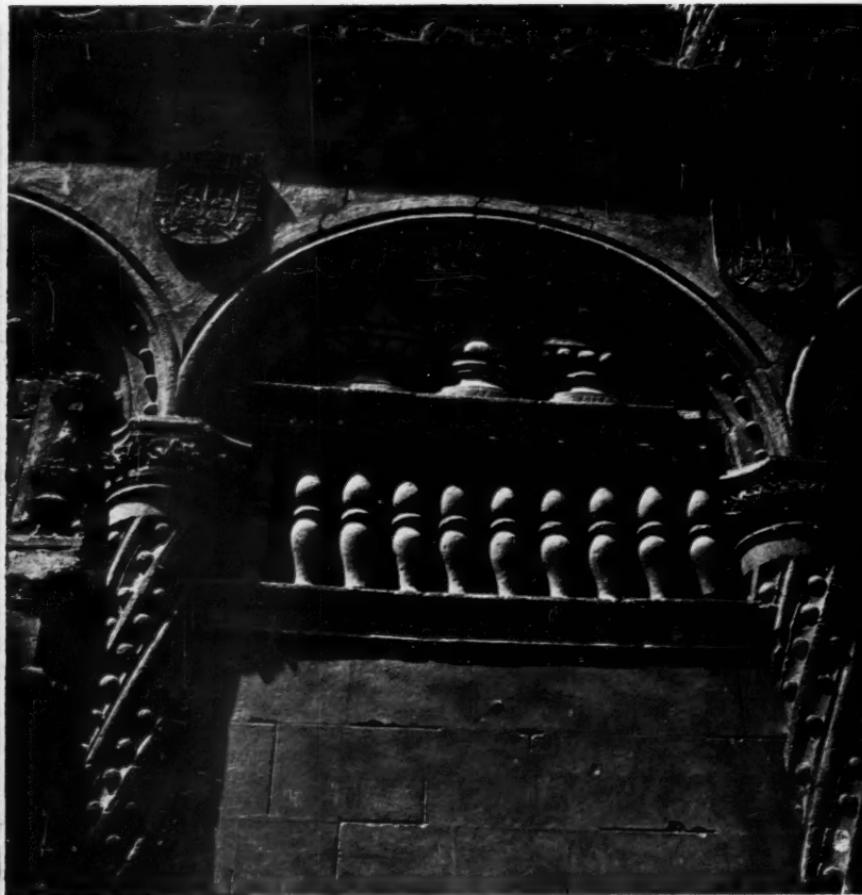
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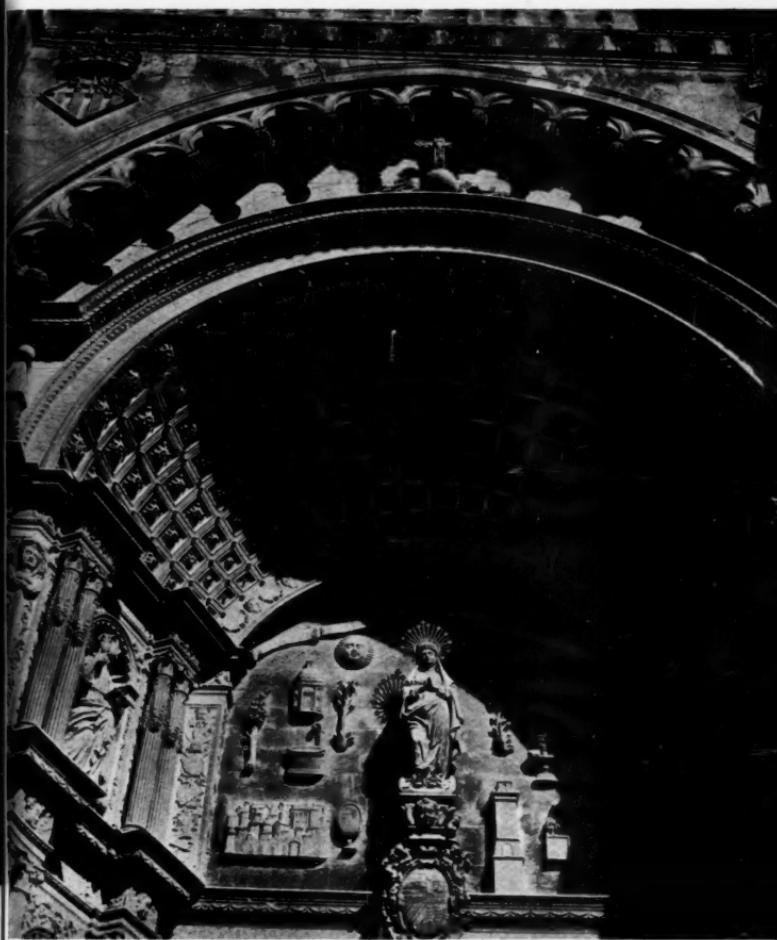
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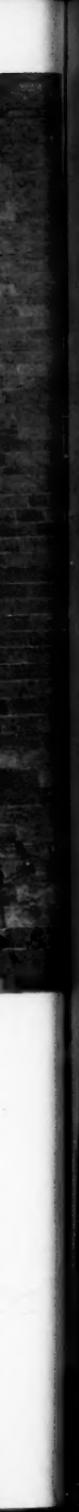
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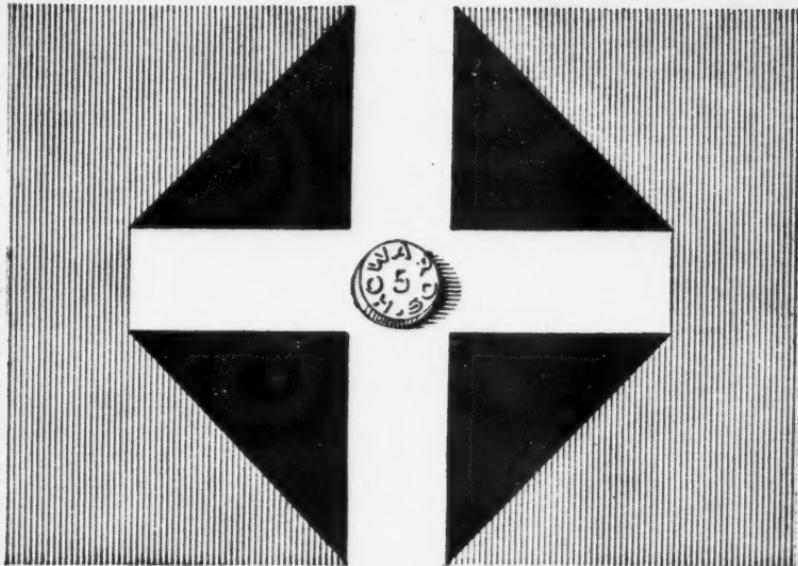
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